

NOVEMBER

25 CENTS

BLUE BOOK

Stories of adventure for MEN, by MEN



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BACK TO THE SEA, VIKING!... by DAVID N. BENEDICT

The young Norsemen of 1942 venture much and fight hard against the invader. A complete book-length novel.

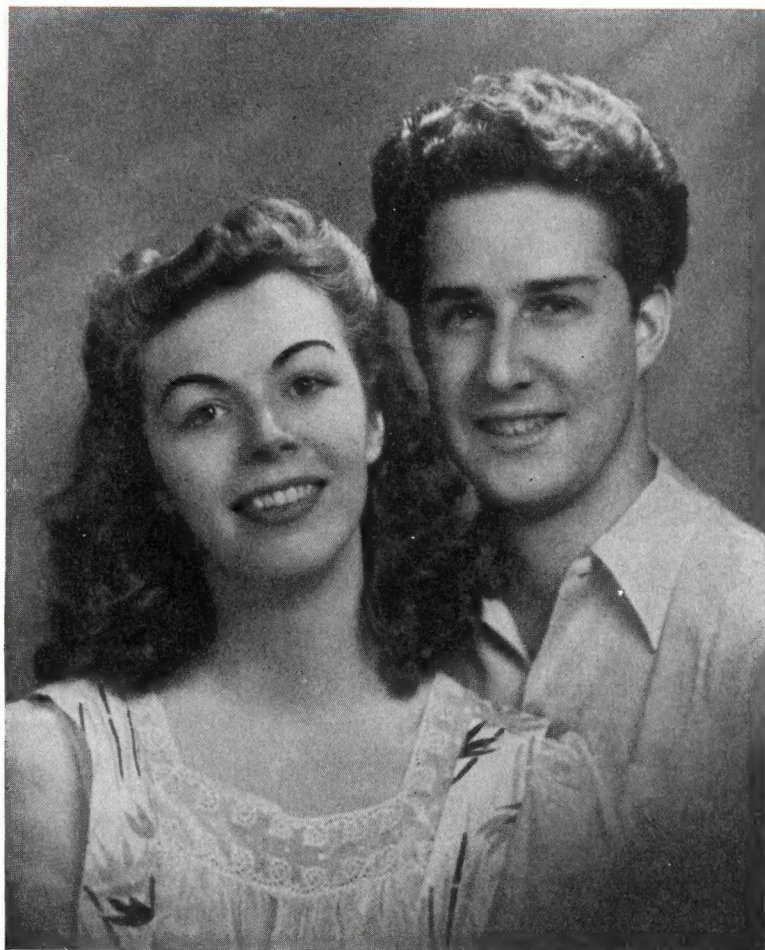
DANGER IS MY MEAT AND DRINK... by HERBERT RAVENEL SASS

One of the most colorful pirates in all fact or fiction rescues a lady and riots to glory in this story by the author of "Desert Blood."



WHO'S WHO *in this* ISSUE

DAVID N BENEDICT



Photograph by Barnett Studio, Santa Monica.

I AM David Benedict. N. is my wife, a Viking daughter. She saw many of the scenes in "Back to the Sea, Viking," enacted on a Norway beach, with realism supplied by German bullets. Much of what she told me is woven into the novel; the rest is better hidden and forgotten.

As for David Benedict: I was born on December 19, 1919, a numerologist's delight. I was graduated from Columbia College in '38, a belligerent mathematician ready to calculate at the drop of a digit. N. was visiting American relatives. We met, walked in Central Park, had long meaningless phone conversations, and sent each other bulky letters written in an algebraic code I had invented. N. went back to Norway, I to Hollywood, where I wrote jokes for radio comedians, movie comedians, and unemployed comedians, until—well, I woke up one morning feeling

very unfunny, and took passage on the next boat for the Orient.

Meanwhile a letter for me arrived in New York, marked *Urgent*. The letter went to Hollywood; I landed at Yokohama. It was forwarded to Tokyo; I was questioned by police at Asama for throwing empty pop-bottles into a sacred volcano. The letter went to Shanghai; I beat it to Tsingtao. Two months after I was back in Los Angeles, it arrived weary and dog-eared, laden with the stamps of the world. I opened it and found my own code. It was from N. Help, *help*, it cried in twenty ways. Plans for escape, false passports, flight to Sweden or England, flashed through my head. I leaped up, ran out the door—and there she was standing before me! How she managed it, we dare not say. And her name—well, all we will say is that it is now Mrs. David N. Benedict.

BLUE BOOK

November, 1942

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Except for stories of Real Experiences, all stories and novels printed herein are fiction and are intended as such. They do not refer to real characters or to actual events. If the name of any living person is used, it is a coincidence.

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READERS' FORUM

SERGEANT IS WORSE THAN THE CORPORAL

One word of advice to any trainee who is a BLUE BOOK fan: "Keep the good ol' book out of sight." I made the mistake of lying around barracks reading it, and the first thing I know, I make with a mop and the sergeant's reading. Then when he's through, two corporals take over. After three P.F.C.'s and a half-dozen acting corporals complete the routine, you're more than surprised at how tired you get from their reading. It's nice making new friends for BLUE BOOK, but very fatiguing.

BLUE BOOK is my oldest and most interesting friend, and as long as you're coming up with "Twice-Told Tales," how about Mr. Bass and Mr. Clumber, those two old vascals of yore with their Oriental valet?

Thank you for twenty years of enjoyment!

Frank J. Ott,
U. S. Army.

THE RIGHT KIND OF READING

The new series "Flags of Our Fathers" by H. Bedford-Jones is an excellent idea. In my mind it represents the best in war-time fiction. The foreword to the series in the August BLUE BOOK should be reprinted and carried in the hearts of all of us in this country today. It represents the kind of thinking Americans should be doing.

This series further confirms my opinion that BLUE BOOK has taken the lead in giving us the right kind of reading at this time: there are enough purely adventure stories to give us the needed relaxation in "escape from reality" reading, and there are enough war stories to make us realize the seriousness of the times. Please keep up the good work.

R. M. Hart,
Cleveland, Ohio.

WE HAVE—AND SHALL AGAIN

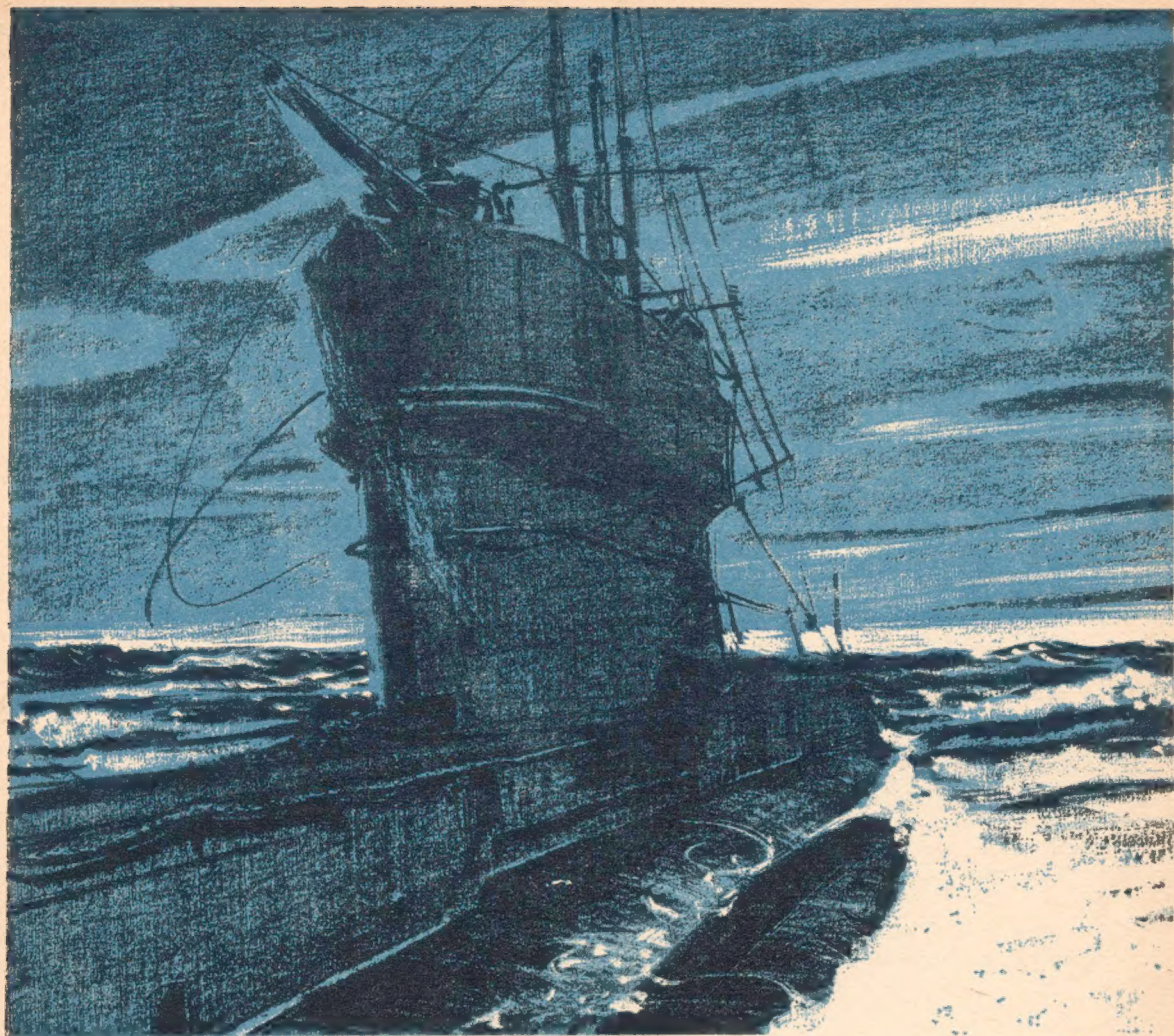
I like your Who's Who department and enjoy reading of the person who writes the stories almost as much as I do reading the stories themselves, and that is very much indeed.

However, I have a suggestion. I have a bit of an amateur interest in art and usually take more than a casual glance at the illustrations in a magazine. Why not let us have a short biographical sketch of some of your artists? The illustrations are an important part of a magazine.

And I must add that the BLUE BOOK is a habit with our family.

M. Rees,
Fort Madison, Iowa.

(Continued on third cover)



RENDEZVOUS

A stirring adventure of Jason Wyatt and America's other wartime secret agents in Europe

THE Italian affair began with a telegram from Basel. Wyatt found it at the hotel in Monte Carlo when he came back from tennis with Susan Bourke. Decoded, the telegram read:

MESSAGE BEGINS HIRE SMALL SAILING BOAT ON MORNING OF TWELFTH AND GO FOR DAYS FISHING OFF CAP FERRAT STOP AT ELEVEN AT NIGHT BE EIGHTEEN MILES DUE SOUTH ANTIBES WITH HARBOR LIGHT ON STARBOARD BEAM STOP WHEN BLINKER LIGHT SIGNALS QUOTE JOHN PAUL UNQUOTE YOU REPLY QUOTE JONES UNQUOTE STOP YOU WILL THEN LEARN MISSION STOP SAY NOTHING TO ANY ONE EVEN BOURKES AS YOUR SUCCESS VITAL TO AMERICAN PLANS AND YOU MUST PLAY GAME ALONE GOOD LUCK MESSAGE ENDS TELLEGAN.

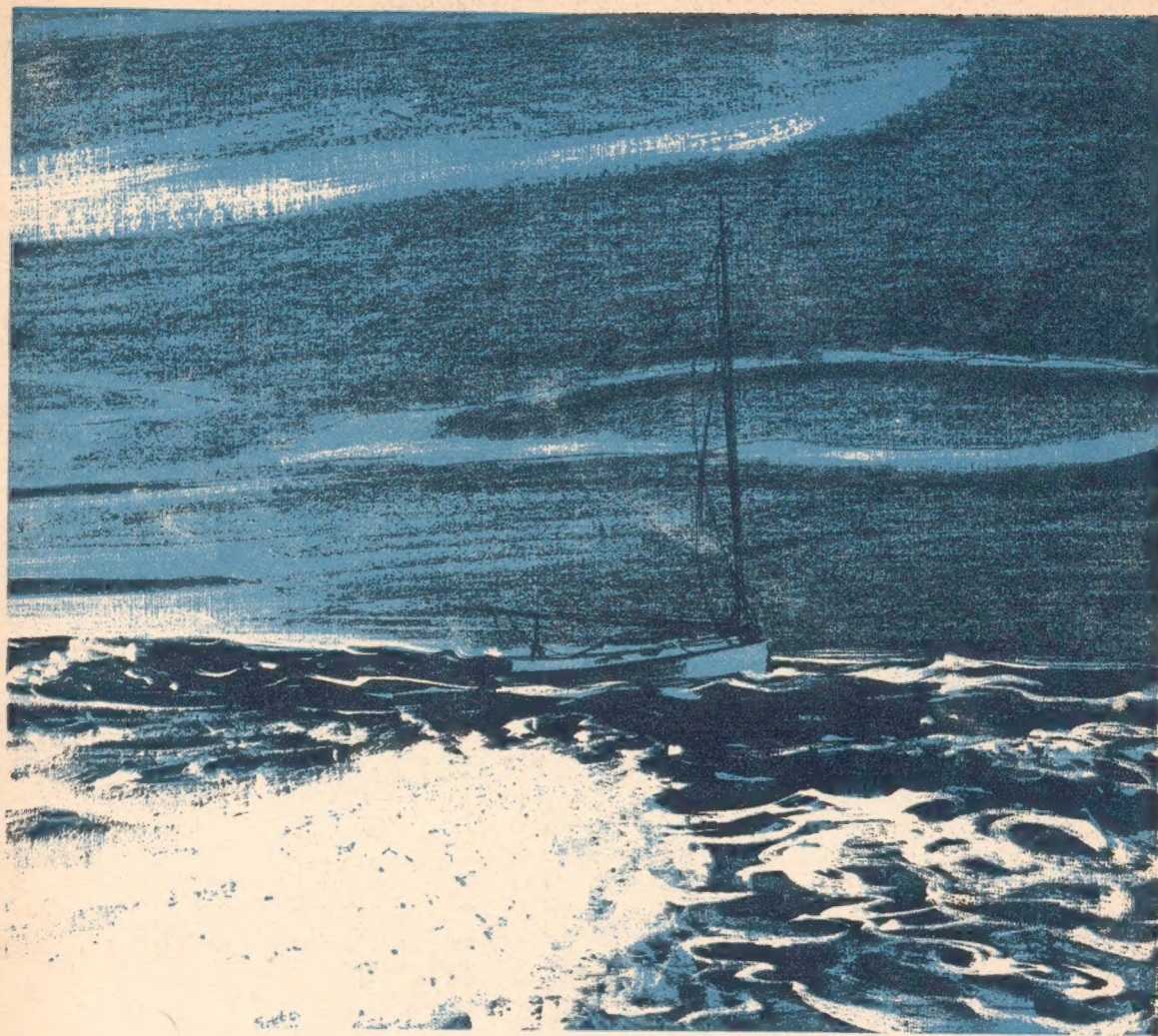
The young diplomatic secret agent whistled softly and then grinned.

"Trust Marse Jim to be as mysterious as possible!" he chuckled.

It was true that Monte Carlo was overrun with spies and informers; indeed, all the Riviera from Marseilles to Ventimiglia on the Italian frontier was a hotbed of intrigue. Tellegan, who with Sunburn Sanderson had just left Monte Carlo, knew that, and naturally, wished to take no risks of the secret mission being betrayed. Yet even so, Wyatt found it queer that he must rendezvous in the Mediterranean to get his orders.

There seemed nothing complicated or dangerous about the rendezvous. He knew signaling, and he had a flashlight; and even his half-forgotten navigation of pre-war yachting days would suffice to put him into the desired position. But what was this mission that demanded such secrecy? What had come up to cancel his return to Basel?

Still pondering, he showered, changed to dinner clothes and went down to join Susan and her father, Mike Bourke, for dinner. The ex-forgery had been up in the mountains along the Italian frontier visiting the secret "drops" where information from



off CAP FERRAT

by FREDERICK PAINTON

spies in American pay came out of Italy.

"The Eyties are plenty worried over the revolt in Yugoslavia and along the Dalmatian coast," Bourke reported. "They've lost eight thousand men in the last two weeks. It's no longer a revolt General Draja Mikhailovitch is leading. It's a bloody war."

Wyatt nodded, pleased. Part of the job of this American Intelligence center in Monaco was to get certain information and supplies to the Yugoslav *chetniks*. Apparently the task was successful if it had the Italians worried. He checked over the other

reports of internal Italian discontent, but every so often his mind reverted to the mysterious mission on which he must leave in the morning.

Susan, blonde, girlish and utterly lovely in a white dinner gown, finally said: "For heaven's sake, Jason, what's biting you? What's on your mind?"

Wyatt flushed and bit his lip. He had hoped this question wouldn't come up. He was not in the habit of refusing Susan anything.

"I guess I'm tired of leaping around the Alps like a bounding chamois," he evaded. "I'm going fishing tomorrow and forget the war."

"Good," said Susan. "I love to fish—if somebody baits my hook and takes off the fish."

Wyatt opened his mouth, shut it. How could he tell her he had to be alone?

Penman Mike Bourke was watching. "Jason wants to go alone, kid," he said. "Don't force him to be rude and tell you so."

Susan's long-lashed eyes widened. "Oh!" she gasped. "He jilts me, does he?"

Wyatt was supposed to go to the Casino with her after dinner—information could be picked up there. But now he rose, mumbled an excuse and walked hastily out to the Place de Paris. From here he strolled to Monaco's harbor quays.



He began by frizzing Wyatt's sleek hair. . . . Then, "Oh, God!" he gasped. "We are under water!"

There was no trouble hiring a small catboat.

"Fishing?" said the swarthy gold-eared owner. "By God's holy breath, monsieur, the bombs have killed them all. And have a care. The glass is falling. There will be a blow before the night comes."

Wyatt said he was a good sailor, paid his deposit and sneaked hurriedly into his room. He sailed at seven.

IN the afternoon a line squall roared out of the west. Howling wind flattened the sea and then whipped it to a gigantic froth; and by dusk, gigantic waves hammered against the breakwaters. Susan, her yellow hair streaming, stood in the rain and peered out into the wild confusion of breaking waves. The sight filled her heart

with terror for Jason. She turned to the man with gold rings in his ears.

"He will be all right, *hein?*" she called above the storm's howl. "Your boat, she will ride out such a storm?"

The man shrugged. "Only the *bon Dieu* can say, *mam'zelle*. That catboat, she is worth many francs. I—" A gust whipped away his voice.

When dark fell, the squall had blown itself out and there was only rain that fell in torrents—an icy rain that was riding the breath of a cold mistral. The Monegasque harbor patrol had put out, but came back in with nothing to report. The catboat had vanished.

"She is finished, *mam'zelle*," said the man with the gold earrings. "You had best go home. You will catch the lung fever, standing here."

Susan returned to the hotel and cried herself to sleep.

The next day's *Le Petit Monégasque*, the four-page paper that Monaco boasted, had a tiny item: "American Drowned," and reported how the capsized catboat had been discovered by Italian Coast Guard patrols off San Remo. Some water-soaked clothing told of the end.

Mike Bourke had expected Susan to faint at this news. Instead, she jumped up, her blue eyes blazing.

"He's alive—he's got to be," she cried. "Jason could swim like an otter. But he's been blown toward Italy. He's ashore there, hiding somewhere, and he'll be captured and shot as a spy."

She seized her coat.

"Where you going?" growled Mike.

"Across the frontier. We've spent months building an organization to get information. Now I'm going to use it to get Jason out."

She hiked her skirts and ran out the door, with her father pelting after her.

AT the customhouse of the Italian State Railways at Ventimiglia, Rizeni Clunn, sub-chief of the OKRA, Italian secret police, also read the news in *Le Petit Monégasque*. He stirred his three hundred pounds of flesh and rubbed the four chins that tumbled like terraces over his narrow collar. Rizeni Clunn had cause to remember Jason Wyatt. Because of the young diplomatic secret agent, Clunn had spent three weeks in the Monaco prison. A note from Benito Mussolini himself to the Prince of Monaco had got him out. But only with the understanding that Clunn should never again come to Monte Carlo. What good food and lovely women were left on the Riviera were in Monte Carlo, and Rizeni Clunn loved both. So he hated Wyatt. Furthermore, he was still intent on breaking up the American espionage and under-cover organization in Italy. Wherefore, he read the item with definite disappointment—also with rising suspicion.

"It is just such a trick as stupid Americans would arrange," he muttered to his second-in-command. "But me, I am not a fool. I do not think he is dead."

"*Si*," said the second-in-command, "but—the storm was indeed very fierce. You stir dead ashes."

"Well," said Clunn, "you are a fool, as all can see. So, presently you will discover that I can see through a pane of glass. I go to Genoa."

He reared his gargantuan body and waddled out.

THE squall did not catch Wyatt unprepared, and he had sailed small boats since a boy in school. But the savage ferocity of the wind was so deadly that only a sea-anchor hastily

made out of the bait-pail and spare spars saved him from capsizing. And stripped naked save for shorts, he had to bail furiously as the gigantic waves swooped upon the small craft and sought to bury her. Even after the wind had shifted and the cold mistral touched him with icy fingers, he was tossed around like a cork.

Worse, by ten o'clock he had lost sight of land. He had no idea where he was or how to reach the rendezvous. Under double-reefed mainsail he groped northwest for land.

Around a quarter after ten, a pale watery moon broke through the canopy of clouds. Briefly, then, he saw stars, and knew he had been blown east. The mistral had the snow of the Alps in it, and he was freezing cold.

At ten minutes to eleven he caught a glimmer of light to the north. It was square in the teeth of the mistral. The light blinked on and off at six-second intervals. Jason lashed the tiller and crept into the tiny cabin. Here were charts, and a glance at them quickly apprised him that this was the light off the harbor entrance to Nice.

He was, then, about eight miles east of the rendezvous, and certainly ten miles too close in. The waves were still mountainous, but he shook out the reefs, came about and headed west by south. By this time he was almost too numb and exhausted to bail when the catboat ran her starboard quarter under water.

HE had no exact memory of when he saw the blinker. He only knew that suddenly, almost dead ahead, a light flickered nervously. He forced his congealed hand to release the main sheet, and crawled on his hands and knees to the cabin where he had left the flashlight to keep it dry.

His fingers would not press the button. Savagely he battered his hand against the bulkhead until the blood rushed hotly and painfully into it. He jumped until he was breathless. Then he stood up and made the answer to the signal. The Aldis lamp blinker made, "Okay." He sank down, exhausted with reaction, and only had presence of mind to leave the flashlight lit to guide the others.

Presently he heard dully the plash of oars, men's voices. Then hands held him, and a voice said: "Good God, he's naked, and damned near frozen to death. Here, Markham, give me that peajacket. Where's that flask of rum?"

Now warmth was around Wyatt, scalding fire poured down his throat, and rough hands kneaded his skin.

The voice said: "Throw a loop around the masthead, Markham. We've got to leave her keel up. Those are the orders."

Now Wyatt was in a small pulling boat. He saw drowsily a rope run

from the catboat's mast to the pulling boat, and at the word, "Give way!" men rowed hard and the catboat slowly tilted and lay wearily on her side.

Wyatt said: "She was a nice sea-boat. She took them chin up."

"Sure, sure," said the cheerful voice. "Relax, guy—you've taken a beating. . . . Give way, men."

Presently Wyatt perceived the outlines of a conning tower, a big cannon forward, and faint light coming from an opened hatch aft near a machine-gun.

"A submarine," he muttered huskily. "Whose? Ours?"

"Right," said the voice. "Here, Waxton, lend a hand. Up you go."

Very swiftly and skillfully Wyatt was handed up to the submarine's deck, and lowered through the hatch, out of which gushed blessed warm air.

"Welcome to the U. S. S. *Grouper*!" said a new voice. It belonged to a young fellow with black curly hair, bright cheerful eyes, dressed in a khaki uniform with the shouldermarks of a lieutenant commander. He was holding out a small whisky-glass.

"Down this," he said; "you're blue around the gills." He turned. "Three-quarters ahead on both engines. Come around to Course 62 and hold her."

"Aye-aye, sir."

Wyatt heard the Diesels roar, and then fell asleep.

When he awakened he found the lieutenant commander—his name was Bill Nichols—holding a mug of hot coffee.

"Nothing like jamok for what ails you," he said cheerfully. "Drink this, and I'll give you your orders."

Wyatt drank gratefully, and found himself feeling better.

"Orders?" he said. "Where are we going?"

"Italy," said Nichols, "—north of Livorno. Here you go."

He gave Wyatt a thick brown envelope covered with red seals that bore the American shield. Wyatt looked at it, puzzled.

"Sealed orders," said Nichols. "I had mine—to sneak through the mines off Livorno—and get here fast. Damn it, I could have put my fish right into an Eytie freighter off Taranto. But my orders were to stop for nothing from Alexandria to Cap Ferrat."

WYATT broke the seals and looked inside. The first thing to meet his eye was four horribly gruesome photographs. There was one showing men dangling dead from a scaffold, taken so close that every horrible detail of their faces was sharply revealed. Another was of Italian troops pouring what was evidently gasoline over a dozen corpses. Again the deadly camera showed their faces. The third showed the corpses in flames. The fourth was taken just as an Italian

firing squad had shot ten men lined against the wall. The camera caught them just toppling; the expression of death and amazement on their sharply seen faces.

"Good God!" Wyatt muttered.

PAPERS were inside, credentials for Pone Giovanni Tascini. Wyatt did not examine them closely, for there was a typewritten sheet headed, "VERY SECRET AND CONFIDENTIAL."

Below he read:

"FROM: G-2 American Task Force in Egypt.

TO: Jason Wyatt, assistant chief American Diplomatic Secret Service. SUBJECT: Countess Maia Petrinja.

1. These orders will be handed to you aboard a vessel assigned to land you on the Italian coast. Aboard this vessel will be Pietro Valtini, who will aid you in the disguise necessary for this mission. You will be guided by him in all such changes of appearance.

2. Upon landing on Italian soil, you will proceed by whatever feasible means to Genoa and go to the Via Palestrina to the Café of the Horned Ram. The signal is three rings made with the bottom of a glass of wine or beer. The countersign is "*Risorgimento*." You will meet Luigi Stefani. He will direct you how to contact La Contessa Maia Petrinja, a Croatian noblewoman of ancient lineage. You will find her, guide her to a rendezvous with the vessel which has brought you. The rendezvous will be agreed upon as to time and place by you and the commanding officer.

3. This woman is the ruler of a Croatian province which lies astride the main line of Italian communications to their troops attempting to quell General Mikhailovitch's uprising. It is necessary for his success, to cut that line of Italian supply. The Croats of the district will not rise without orders from the Countess Petrinja. Hence, at all costs she must be transported to the Dalmatian coast, where some of General Mikhailovitch's chetniks will guide her to her province. Once her peasants revolt, the whole of southern Croatia will fall to General Mikhailovitch.

4. You will spare no effort or money to bring this vitally important woman to her destination.

The order was signed by the chief of American Military Intelligence for the entire European and North African war theater.

Wyatt blew out his breath softly, and his eyes brightened. This was terrific. Hastily he scanned the other papers. These gave him the background of one Giovanni Tascini, a Croatian renegade who had been caught in Cairo as an Italian spy. "*Memorize this and destroy*," Wyatt's orders read.

"You'd better let this Corporal Pietro Valtini get to work on you, Wyatt," said Nichols presently. "We're going to submerge and stand in to shore in an hour."

"Bring him on," grinned Wyatt.

Wyatt was in the tiny officers' wardroom, which was also the submarine's forward battery room. Now into the small space came a short, pudgy man in the khaki of the Army. He was pale and bulbous-lipped, and he carried a small lacquered case.

"I do not like this, Captain," he said sadly; "I feel I am locked in a safe, sir."

"Never mind," said Nichols; "you're all right. Get busy on Mr. Wyatt."

"Ah, Madonnal!" The corporal opened the case. "Once I am Pietro of the Plaza, and I am the best damn permanent-wave man in New York. Who would think I fix hair on a submarine?"

He got Wyatt upright on the steel-framed chair, gave him an expert appraisal and plugged in an electric iron. While this was heating, he got out an enlarged glossy photograph, evidently of the real Tascini, studied it with frequent glances at Wyatt.

"Si," he said; "you are well chosen. I fix you so his mother greets you as her son."

HE began by frizzing Wyatt's sleek brown hair and dyeing it jet black. He stained Wyatt's face a swarthy brown, and shoved some wax under the cheek-skin to make a mole.

Wyatt endured this as he studied Tascini's background. It all seemed straightforward and simple except for one thing: why had the gruesomely horrible photographs been included in the dossier? There was no reference to them anywhere in the papers.

His eyebrows were being made thick and black and bushy, when a klaxon cawed raucously.

"Oh, God!" cried Pietro. "Now we go under the water."

Wyatt did not reply. Another fact had struck him hard: Why was it necessary to send him, of all people, to take Countess Petrinja out of Italy? Was she a prisoner? Why could not their spies have done as much?

His thoughts were interrupted by a series of hisses and babbings and taut voices:

"Pressure in the hull, sir!"

"A and B vents opened, sir."

"Steering shifted from the bridge to the control-room, sir."

"Ten degrees dive on the forward diving plane."

Then came the Captain's voice. "Take her down to sixty feet. Hold six-four true."

Wyatt felt the deck slant beneath his feet. There was complete silence now, save for a soft electric hum. A pencil rolled to the incline and hit the floor with a loud thud. Pietro shiv-

ered. "I am now frightened," he muttered. "It is like the tomb."

"Make it eighty feet," said Captain Nichols. "We must get below the mines."

Even as he spoke, something scraped softly along the side of the hull, and Wyatt's heart leaped into his throat. . . . Some minutes later Nichols came in to say they were past the mine field.

"You feel all right?" he said to Wyatt. "You look pale around the chops."

"I'm fine," said Wyatt.

THE carter, whose name was Roberto, pulled on the reins of his scrawny donkey and yelled: "Whoa, Giuseppe, my love." He turned.

"There, signor, that is the Café of the Horned Ram." He sighed hugely. "Once, my friend, I ate there a meal that put fat on a man's ribs. Now, God knows, even I eat less than a bird, and if you report me to the OKRA, then the Lord will scald you."

Wyatt looked across the smelly cobbled street that skirted Genoa's dirty waterfront. It was empty and wet at this time of day. Six hours had passed since he had been rowed ashore. It had been his own idea to ask a ride of this carter, and well he had, for the gendarmes at the gate, arrogant in their Napoleonic cocked hats and white cross-belts, were stopping pedestrians. They knew Roberto, however, and gave Wyatt only a passing glance.

Wyatt climbed down over the huge wheel.

"Thanks, Roberto," he said. "Rest at ease. I too think a man's stomach needs filling, and here are two lire, at least for a glass on me."

"You are kind," said Roberto, "and I take the money for milk for my bambino. Ah, this *guerra*. God give it end soon, so a man can eat and laugh and enjoy the fruit of his work."

He drove on, mumbling to himself. Wyatt went into the empty café and ordered a glass of Chianti. The waiter brought it indifferently. But when Wyatt summoned him to renew the glass, he started, for Wyatt had spilled some wine and made three interlocking rings with the bottom of the glass.

"*Risorgimento!*" said Wyatt quietly.

"*Galienti!*" muttered the waiter, naming the leader of the underground anti-Fascist movement. "Will the signor please to follow me?"

There was a back room built on piles over the lapping water. Here sat a squint-eyed man, with mustache and goatee full of gray. His cheek was scarred, his mouth thin and hard.

"I have been told of your coming," he said. "She lives in a pale-blue villa on the Via Vittoria on the mountain under the fortress walls. She drinks much and likes too many men."

This Stefani made no offer to shake hands.

"I am not here to pass judgment on her morals," said Wyatt. "You know my orders."

"I will guide you there," said Stefani. "If this will help throw down the monster Mussolini, I ask no more."

Before Wyatt could reply a curtain on the left trembled. Then a girl shot out, and straight into his arms.

"Jason!" she gasped joyously. "I knew you could not drown."

"Susan!" Wyatt was too dumfounded to do more than add: "What in the name of heaven are you doing here?"

"Looking for you," she said, and then calmly kissed him. "I recognized your voice. I don't like your black hair or your painted tan, or your slouch or your moles. But your disguise is perfect. Why are you here? I can help. I've been hours coming over the hills from Mentone."

Wyatt, now recovered, said: "You'll go back home. I'm all right. I need no help and I can't be worried about you falling into the hands of the OKRA."

She pouted. "I've been over the underground railroad many times. I'm safe enough—"

"But you'll go home now," said Wyatt sharply. "You're endangering a vital mission."

He was afraid to look into her pleading eyes to hear more. He turned to Stefani. "Let's get to Countess Petrinja's."

Stefani, eyes weary, rose.

Susan said: "If you make love to that old witch—"

"Please, Susan," said Wyatt. "At least stay under cover until I get this business done."

He went out abruptly, knowing she was close to tears of fury at him. Stefani had got his hat. Together they walked up the steep mountainside on which Genoa sprawls above the sea.

LA CONTESSA MAIA PETRINJA sat in her living-room eying a glass of *strega* that her fat maid Marie had left as usual. Madam la Contessa was small and slender, and though she was thirty-nine, her orange-yellow hair was tied with a girlish bow, and she had heavily rouged her lips and cheeks. Her eyes were purple depths of disipation.

She had the despair and inertia of one who has lived too much and too swiftly. She had drunk too often, sought men she did not love. Why? Only because Sergei Solovich, the man she had married, had hated her way of life and wished to live quietly and care for the peasants who farmed her acres. Now Sergei was a traitor, fighting with the *chetniks*. And she was alone, pursuing the bright flame of gayety—and never knowing a happy moment. She frowned, and downed the *strega* in a gulp. As she put down the glass, Marie entered.

"A man to see you, Madam la Contessa." Her eyes were disapprovingly on the empty glass. "He says he has a message from your home."

The Countess' heart leaped. From Sergei perhaps.

"Show him in."

Wyatt entered, hat in hand, and bowed low. But his eyes took in her orange hair, her hollow cheeks, the ashes of her beauty.

"Well?" she said.

He had prepared his speech. And now he told her glowingly of the resistance to Italian domination. Of how *chetniks* had defeated German *Sturmtruppen*.

"Madam la Contessa, a move to free all northern Croatia depends upon you. Your people love you, obey you. If they will rise, admit the *chetniks*, then the Italians must retreat to the coast. They cannot even hold Zagreb. Your people ask that you give the order. They will listen to no one else. A way to take you safely to them has been found. I am to guide you."

Wyatt paused. Then he said: Madam, the tortured people of your country ask for you."

Countess Maia Petrinja had listened, her brows knitting, her cheeks pale with mounting anger.

"Nonsense!" she burst out. "What are these lies you spout? Do you want me to have my people butchered? Why should my Croats fight to put the cursed Serbs back in power? Always the Serbs and the Slavs have divided the power and the wealth, and for the Croats there was only work and sweat."

She had risen and now walked to him.

"One thing I know: Mussolini fears a united Yugoslavia. He will never permit the Serbs to dominate and despoil the Croats. There will be a free Croatia under Italian protection. There will be no blood shed save that of fools. I will not go with you. I will not listen to you."

WYATT stood speechless with surprise. Of all the developments in this queer mission, the one he had expected least was the refusal of this woman to go. For an instant he stared at her slight quivering body.

Then he remembered the pictures. Of course! Fearing such an eventuality, they had been put in to convince.

"Peace! Tranquillity!" he put a sneer into his voice. "So you think that. Then look! Here are pictures of the idyllic life your peasants lead under Mussolini. Here is a new dance they do—on air."

He thrust into her hands the photo of the gallows. She gasped.

"Why, I know—there is Draja—Mikhail—Andref—"

"Certainly you know them," thundered Wyatt. "And these—and these—a nice bonfire they make."



"I will not listen to your lies! I will not go with you. I will call the police . . . and have you shot!"

She was shuddering. Wyatt took hope. But suddenly she thrust them fiercely back at him.

"Lies!" she sneered. "I know you Croats. To gain your end, nothing is too foul. I am a friend of Edda Ciano, daughter of Mussolini himself. She has told me the truth of how well my people are treated."

"Yes," said Wyatt fiercely, "and have you tried to go home?"

"She says it is not safe."

"She lies. You are a prisoner in Italy, and you will find it out, once you ask to leave—"

"I will not listen to your lies," she cut in, and pushed against his breast so that he fell back to the door.

"You are no Croat. You are a dirty Serb. I will not go with you. I will tell my people to keep the peace. Begone, before I call the police and have you shot as a dirty spy."

Wyatt found himself blinking in the sunlight. She called after him: "The police were here an hour ago. You get out of Italy—or I will turn you in."

TO Wyatt, as he walked down the escarpment to the city below, it seemed as if the game was wholly lost. How could you take a woman out of enemy country against her will? A scream, a struggle—and Wyatt would

face a drumhead court-martial and a firing squad. She might even betray him to the police as it was. Yet as he walked along, his eyes hardened, and his chin thrust out. There was a way to prevent her betrayal. By the Lord, there was a way this game might still be won! It was bold and dangerous, and for an instant he thought he would have to dismiss it as impossible. But as he reached the city below, he knew there was no other way.

He turned north and walked to the police station.

To the lieutenant at the desk, he said in an arrogant whine: "I am Giovanni Tascini, confidential agent of Count Ciano himself. I need help on a mission. Where is your superior?"

The lieutenant quit playing with the rosette on his Napoleonic hat. He rose.

"The captain is conferring with His Excellency, Rizeni Clunn of the OKRA. But he will see you. Come!"

For an instant Wyatt froze! Clunn! Of all people—he saw the lieutenant's gaze upon him. He forced a smile. It was too late to retreat now. He followed the officer into the next room.

Wyatt heard Clunn's oily voice: "It may have been a ruse to get into Italy for a mission."

Then Wyatt understood Clunn's presence here. The irony of it! The storm, instead of aiding his plan, had hindered—had made the wreck of the catboat look like an obvious stratagem to appear dead. And Clunn had seen through it.

Humped over, his shoulders twisted, Wyatt endured Rizeni Clunn's cold marble eyes.

The young captain with a huge mustache spoke first. "What have we here?"

Again Wyatt spoke in an arrogant whine.

"I am Count Ciano's confidential man. His Excellency has reason to suspect that the Countess Petrinja wishes to return to her people. I was sent to investigate. I am an *agent provocateur*—among other things. The Countess pretended she is not going back to Croatia, but I know she is. I heard reference to her husband Sergei—she does not know I understand Croat. I ask for her immediate arrest, and a stateroom reservation on tonight's Rome Express."

He ceased to speak, and the silence was not immediately broken. He felt Clunn's sharp eyes on him. But the man could not penetrate the disguise. It was impossible. Pietro was a genius.

The captain said: "Your credentials?"

Wyatt produced them, fumbled them awkwardly to make sure no habitual gesture betrayed him. The captain studied them.

"Count Ciano's own fist and seal," whined Wyatt. "I demand your aid."

"Oh, you'll get it," yawned the captain. "All is in order, Signor Clunn."

"Yes, I know," said Clunn. "I've heard of Tascini. So you wish an arrest—and transportation?"

"Si."

"As a matter of fact," Clunn went on, "I have entertained the same thought about La Contessa, but for different reasons. I shall have her arrested at once. We shall both take her to Rome. I wish it made known that I had my suspicions before your more positive information arrived."

WYATT felt his heart sink. But there was nothing he could say. "If you wish, signor, you may travel with us. But I wish it understood that the lady is my prisoner. My orders are explicit."

"Just why?" Clunn asked softly.

"Because there are others believed involved. Count Ciano personally wishes to get to the bottom of the affair."

"I shall not interfere with your prisoner," said Clunn mildly.

Wyatt laughed boastfully. "I fooled her neatly. She thought I brought a message from her people. She pretended she would denounce me as a spy. But you see she has not reported. Hence, it proves she is planning to escape—and I know how."

"How?" said Clunn.

"That, signor, is for Count Ciano's ears alone. And now, signores, if you please—I have other matters. I will return at six. The train departs at seven-thirty. I wish La Contessa here."

Avoiding Clunn's cold eye, Wyatt shambled out. None molested him. Once clear and walking to the dockside, he heaved a breath of relief. So far, so good. The Countess would denounce him, of course, but his admission that he was an *agent provocateur*, sent to wheedle the truth out of her, would cover that. She would deny any thought of escape, but that was to be expected and disbelieved. The presence of Rizeni Clunn on the train was the only dangerous element now. So Jason headed for the Café of the Horned Ram.

BOTH Susan and Stefani were in the rear room. Wyatt gave her a hard look. "So you wouldn't go home! Well, now that you're here, you'll work—and like it."

He told them all that had occurred.

"So," he concluded, "the Rome Express must be stopped briefly this side of Livorno. I'll handle Clunn and get the Countess off. I'll still have time to meet the submarine at eleven off Cap Caprini."

Susan, pale as flour, moaned: "Clunn! Jason, he's dangerous. Clever! How do you know he doesn't already suspect you?"

"If he had," grinned Wyatt, "he'd never have let me walk out."

Stefani's eyes had kindled.

"Signor, that is the bravest act—the boldest scheme—I have ever known. I have friends. A boulder on the track! The Rome Express will stop near Lucca, I assure you."

Wyatt shrugged. "She knows what it means to be suspected in Rome. She has her choice—trying to prove her innocence there—or going with me. I think she will come willingly. If not"—his jaw clamped—"she comes anyway. After she is in Croatia, she will learn the truth and lead her people to rise."

"I'm afraid," whispered Susan with pallid lips—"for you."

"Then get over it," said Wyatt sharply. "You will be near the police station as I come out with Clunn and the Countess. If anything is wrong, I'll whistle a snatch of 'The Prisoner's Lament.' Then you and Stefani will do what you can—which probably can't help. Now, Stefani, a place to nap. I was up all night."

Avoiding Susan's eyes, Wyatt went in to a dark bedroom and lay down on a pallet. He had pled fatigue to avoid any further protest from her. Actually he was so tired he was asleep in ten minutes.

Both Susan and Stefani were gone when Stefani's fat wife awakened him at five-thirty.

"I am to say, signor," she told him, "that all is arranged as you wish. My husband swore it was so."

Wyatt thanked her, dashed water in his face, and ten minutes later walked up the inclined street to the police station.

THE instant he entered the captain's office, he knew something was wrong. Two gendarmes had fallen in behind him. Besides the traditional sword, each carried an automatic pistol in a black box holster.

The captain said: "Signor Clunn wishes you in the next office, Signor Tascini."

Silently Wyatt entered the adjacent office. Clunn sat there, breaking pistachio nuts, tossing the hulls on the floor. He had crossed his elephantine legs, and his stomach rested on his knees.

Across from him sat a pale infuriated Countess Maia Petrinja.

Wyatt forced himself to the supreme effort.

"Ah, Contessa," he whined, "I am desolated to see you so."

She leaped to her feet. Her eyes were blazing.

"Seize him at once," she cried shrilly. "He has the temerity to return."

Wyatt felt Clunn's eyes upon him. The young agent looked gloomy.

"Ah, Madam la Contessa," he whined softly, "I do only my duty. A trip to Rome and a talk with Count Ciano—that will arrange matters."

She gasped and cried: "What do you mean?"

"Yes," said Clunn, "what do you mean?"

"I do not understand your attitude, Signor Clunn," said Wyatt obsequiously. "La Contessa is under protective arrest for me to escort to Rome. What more is there to know?"

"Madam la Contessa has told me," said Clunn quietly, "that you are a Croatian spy who approached her today with the offer to help her flee to Zagreb. She refused, and only out of kindness of her heart did she fail to report you. But now that you have betrayed her—"

"Do you mean to say you believe La Contessa Petrinja in such stupid lies?" protested Wyatt. "I am Giovanni Tascini, and I hold the Order of the Crown for what I have done. I came to her, yes, in the guise of a Croatian patriot—but only to discover for myself that the suspicions regard-

ing her are true. She immediately yielded to my offer. We were to escape tonight by submarine—so she thinks—and land on the Dalmatian coast. The moment she consented to flee, I came here and asked for her immediate arrest."

"He lies—he lies in his teeth," shrieked the orange-blond woman. She was shaking, but—and this was much more—her face was wretchedly pale beneath the rouge and powder. She was beginning to see the depths of this trap.

"What reason should I have," said Clunn—and even he looked oddly puzzled—"why should I believe your story as against hers?"

"I do not ask you to believe anything I say," whined Wyatt abjectly. "I have asked you for one thing: transportation for myself and this woman to Rome. You are free to accompany us. Together we shall stand in front of Count Ciano, my *padrone*, and he will decide about this woman. Beyond delivering her to him, I have naught else to do. But *per Bacco*, Signor Clunn, prevent me from taking her to Rome, and you will know what it is to face Count Ciano's wrath."

Wyatt fell silent, sensed the sudden terrific suspense in the air, and knew he should speak no more. With a typical Latin gesture he folded his arms on his chest and stared with half-closed eyes at Clunn.

Clunn clung to his suspicions. "You speak of a submarine. How knew you of this? Or was it a lie also?"

Wyatt knew that he must convince Clunn, and boldly chose the one way to do it.

"It was no lie," he said. "An American submarine with a certain American agent, Jason Wyatt, aboard, was to appear tonight off the coast—somewhere south of here. He, or men with him, was to come for La Contessa. That I know positively, because a copy of the secret order to the submarine was shown me by Count Ciano himself."

CLUNN came up off the chair in one great heave. "*Diavolo!*" he bellowed. "So that was it." He turned on Wyatt. "Know you how it is possible to capture those who would come—this Wyatt, for instance? I have an old score I would settle with him."

Wyatt's heart pounded. By the Lord, he had won! He had put over the gamble. He shrugged.

"Signor," he said, "if they would come to Madam la Contessa's home, they might be snared. They were to come—by seven tonight. But that is your affair, and not mine. I must take La Contessa to Rome."

"You will wait," said Clunn excitedly. "It is important that this snare be properly set. Those people



Clunn hung up. "It approaches the time," he said.

know much of the underground movement in Italy. She shall return to her villa, and we will hide, and when they enter—"

"Impossible!" Wyatt shook his head. "I must deliver La Contessa at noon tomorrow in Rome. Only by leaving immediately can I do that."

"None the less," said Clunn softly, "you will wait. I shall see that you and she have a plane. I have the power—and in view of Count Ciano's impatience— But not until I have this cursed American and those he has with him. Why, I can break the whole underground rebellion."

He walked swiftly for a man so fat, and a moment later Wyatt heard him on the telephone talking to the Imperial Army airfield. Wyatt listened gloomily. He had gambled much to have Clunn stay at the villa and not interfere on the train. He had lost miserably. Yet he realized that it would be madness to protest further.

Madam la Contessa was glaring at him balefully. "I promise you a handful of steel for this day's work," she said savagely.

"I only do my duty, Madam la Contessa," he said truthfully.

Later, when Clunn had waddled back, they had a meal of sorts. It was eaten in silence. La Contessa was drinking heavily and beginning to be frightened. She knew the ways of Fascism, and was beginning to wonder how friendly her friends would be. Wyatt was thinking of how he could keep the submarine rendezvous. Clunn had his own thoughts behind his deep-set eyes of cunning.

Presently Clunn rose. "It is time to go." He stared hard at Wyatt. "We will await them alone. The police will come at a quarter after seven."

"As you will," Wyatt pretended indifference.

They went outside in the late dusk. Clunn, as an OKRA chief, rated a small Fiat with real gasoline. It was at the curb. With fat gallantry he went ahead and held the door for La Contessa. Wyatt, bringing up the

rear, saw a movement near one of the small poplars that ornamented the street. He recognized Susan Bourke.

He began to hum, loud enough for her to hear. "*If I had the wings of an angel—*" She began to move away. But what could she and Stefani do? He climbed into the car.

"You seem happy," sneered Clunn.

"A thousand-lire reward is not to be sneezed at these days, signor," said Wyatt. "Count Ciano pays well those who do his missions perfectly."

"In that case, excuse me a moment," said Clunn. "I forgot to give the captain an order."

He heaved out of the car and was gone ten minutes. The Countess remained silent, and so did Wyatt. Presently Clunn made the car rock with his weight.

"*Avanti!*" he ordered and the car moved off. As it knocked and wheezed up the mountainside, Wyatt had a moment of chill fear. Why had Clunn, who never forgot anything, gone back into the police station?

But the fat OKRA man made no comment, seemed no different. He relaxed.

La Contessa drew her slender body away from Wyatt, who was crowded close by the fat frame of Clunn. At the villa she got out sullenly.

"I will have you both broken for this, you will see," she said thickly.

Wyatt did not reply, nor Clunn, and they went into the villa. Clunn himself pulled all the curtains—the black-out edict was stern. Then the lights were lit. And much to Wyatt's amazement, the fat man sat at the piano and began to play some obscure concerto. He had a good touch, and Wyatt saw the man really wanted to play, and this was not an act. La Contessa poured herself a strong drink of *strega*. Wyatt could only sit. It was the weirdest half-hour he had ever endured.

SUDDENLY, just as Clunn was pounding the forte finale, the telephone rang. La Contessa went to it, spoke briefly, and then turned to Clunn.

"It is for you, fat one," she said contemptuously.

Clunn struck a final note regretfully, rose, and gave Wyatt a sidelong look. Then he went to the phone and spoke into it.

What the message could be Wyatt could not even surmise, for Clunn said only, "*Sì, sì,*" and "*No!*" and, "Then the matter arranges itself so. *Buono!*" He hung up.

"It approaches the time, my friend," he said, returning to the piano.

"I cannot be responsible for others," said Wyatt shortly. "I told you the plans. If they take alarm, who am I to prevent it?"

"That is so."

Clunn quit running the scales and came across the room. He stood facing Wyatt. Now, suddenly, without warning, he snatched out a gun and shoved the muzzle so brutally into Wyatt's stomach that the wind was knocked out of him, and he gasped in agony.

"Get your hands up, you dog of an American!" he cried hotly. "That was Ciano on the telephone. You've lied. Tascini is in Cairo. There is no order to arrest Madam la Contessa. You are Jason Wyatt. And by God, I promise you a taste of hell before I am done with you."

Even as he finished speaking and while Wyatt was bent forward helplessly, the fat man swung his fist and smashed at Wyatt's face. Jason crashed to the floor, and Clunn pounced upon him, wrested out his gun and pocketed it. He kicked Wyatt in the side.

"Madam la Contessa," he said, "I beg Your Highness' pardon for this indignity. But I could not be certain of this man—the disguise was excellent. If he had not hummed that song, I might never have suspected. He did not disguise that hum. That is why I returned to put in the telephone-call to Rome. But I assure you he will be gone from here in a few moments."

La Contessa had put down her *strega*. On her face was a most unusual expression.

"An American, you say?" she murmured.

"But yes, an American secret agent. I have met him before—in Monte Carlo some months ago. He operates a spy chain in Italy. But it is one we will soon smash now—before we shoot him."

Wyatt had recovered sufficiently to hear these last words. He now dragged himself upright and sank into a chair. He felt definitely sick at his stomach.

La Contessa said: "So you are an American and not a Croat? Then—" She broke off, looking very queer indeed.

Clunn said to her: "Tie his hands. He—"

HE never finished the sentence, for the door suddenly opened behind him. There was a quick slap of footsteps. Susan Bourke put a gun-muzzle to the roll of fat above Clunn's collar. Stefani leaped in front of Clunn, presented an automatic pistol.

"Signor," he said softly, "and signora, we ask you to remain quiet."

Wyatt got shakily to his feet.

"Susan, how in the world—"

"Darling," she cut in, "we followed you. Stefani was suspicious—and I was scared something would go wrong. We waited outside a few minutes—"

Clunn had stood shaking like jelly with fury. Susan, assuming that

Illustrated by
Austin Briggs



*Susan threw herself
into the line of fire...
gave a little gasp as
the bullet hit.*

Stefani controlled the situation, had stepped to Wyatt, concerned over his paleness.

"You're not well—" she began.

"Look out!" yelled Stefani. "You're getting into the line of fire, and—"

Clunn had moved like a striking cobra. His weapon whipped up, and the gun-blazed almost before it was level.

Susan had seen in a split-second what threatened. She threw herself into the line of fire. She gave a little gasp as the bullet hit her, then pitched into Wyatt's arms.

There were two more shots then, within a heartbeat of each other. Clunn had fired again at Wyatt's head. But Stefani, now that Susan

was out of the way, fired a split-second sooner.

Rizeni Clunn's bullet went into the ceiling; and Stefani's put a new blue eye, edged in crimson, right over the bridge of the OKRA chief's nose.

Slowly, quietly, the dying man folded into segments. He fell to his fat knees, then forward on his huge belly, where he rocked for a second and then rolled over on his back. By now he was quite dead, despite a few involuntary twitches.

"Good God!" muttered Wyatt. "Susan, where did it get you?"

She grimaced and smiled. "A lady can't say, but it's below the waistline—and not in front."

Wyatt placed her on the couch.



Now, for the first time, Maia Petrinja moved.

"Turn your backs," she snapped, "I'll attend to her. The foolish child! Risking her life for you."

Wyatt turned away and looked at Stefani.

The bearded man said: "I'm glad I could shoot him in hot fury. He had to die—he recognized me—and later in cold blood it would have been difficult."

"Yes," said Wyatt. "He has had the police come. We must hurry."

"There are five police—my men will hold them," said Stefani, "for a while." His face suddenly twisted in fury. "Some day we will hold them all—against a wall. Some day there will be food and freedom, and laughter and peace—and then Italy will be Italy again."

Presently Susan was able to limp. She blushed and so did Wyatt, although he did not know why.

Abruptly Maia Petrinja said: "Those photographs are real—not fakes?"

"I swear it, madam," said Wyatt, suddenly recalling his mission. "That is why your people need you. Why you must come with me tonight to Dalmatia."

She did not object. She was staring at Susan Bourke.

"I have sought everything and got nothing," she muttered. "This little girl catches a bullet in an embarrassing place—and has love and happiness and contentment—and her man. I—I ran away. But I will go back. Maybe if I go with my people—and have less wine and food and more hardship and terror, I shall gain Sergei—and peace in my heart."

She nodded to Wyatt.

"You have a splendid girl. See that you appreciate her. Me, I go with you, and if Sergei tells me to raise the peasants, then they shall rise to the last man."

In that instant Wyatt saw Maia Petrinja not as a faded scrawny woman with orange-blond hair, but the descendant of the fierce *chetniks* who had carved out a kingdom with their swords.

"We had better go now, then," he said softly, and helped Susan out into the darkness of the night. . . .

At midnight, just north of Livorno on the rocky shore, Wyatt made the signal, and presently, out in the blue-gray of the dying moonlight, an Aldis lamp blinked a cheery reply. He stood with his arm around Susan's shoulders. She was shivering in the cool of the mistral. Madam la Contessa heard the plash of oars.

"Hold me too," she shivered. "You are so brave and fearless, and I—I force myself to go on."

Wyatt clasped her scrawny shoulders.

Presently the boat touched against the rocks. A petty officer held it so while a sailor helped them down. Wyatt helped the two women into the boat, and shook hands with Stefani.

"Good luck," he said. "We are across the frontier now. But soon, I hope, we march to the final battle."

"God grant it so," said Stefani. "You are a brave man, signor; it has helped to know you."

Now the petty officer steadied Wyatt as he leaped into the rocking boat. He seated himself beside Susan and La Contessa. A flashlight blazed briefly and swept his face. Susan, staring at him, said: "Jason, you're pale, ill. What is the matter?"

Wyatt grinned wryly. "I wish we could have taken that plane or the overland way out. I'm scared of this submarine trip."

Another story by Frederick Painton will appear in an early issue.

Another

THE BASIS OF THIS EXTRAORDINARY
NARRATIVE—APPARENTLY A LEGEND
OF THE CREATION ON ANOTHER PLANET,
IS SAID TO HAVE BEEN DECIPHERED
FROM A MESSAGE PICKED UP BY AN
ULTRA-SENSITIVE RADIO RECEIVER.



World Begins

A fantasy by Nelson Bond

THERE has been much disagreeable comment on the case of our late brother, the Yana Nadron, and we number amongst us many who feel that the punishment meted out to him, severe as it was, still did not exact complete retribution for the evil he loosed in our midst.

It is with these vengeful ones I should like to take issue.

Now, let it not be thought that I view with approval the experiments of the learned and unhappy Doctor Nadron. The reverse is true; being one of his oldest friends and earliest confidants, I was perhaps the first to warn him against doing that which he did. This warning I delivered on the night the Yana conceived his staggering ambition.

But in refutation of those who contend that his intention was to overthrow our great civilization, destroy our culture, and turn the rulership of our beloved homeland into the hands of barbarian monstrosities, I feel I should present the true facts.

Doctor Nadron is more to be pitied than scorned. His was the sad fate of one who, delving into secrets better left unlearned, succeeded only in creating a monster stronger than its maker. . . .

Well I remember the night the Yana's dream was born. It was the Night of Utter Black which occurs but once in each twelve revolutions of Kios. Both suns were set, and all nine moons were vanished from the sky. No doubt the burning stars shone true in the encircling jet vault of space, but from our refuge they could not be seen. Great clouds clung thickly to our shielding Dome; against its transparent hemisphere, frore torrents of corrosive rain lashed in unending fury.

Though our shelters are warmed and kept dry for just such times as these, my body creaked and groaned when I tried to move; one limb was so stiffened in its socket that I could scarcely will it to function. Nadron was in better condition, having but recently completed a rehabilitation at the Clinic, but the condensation affected his vision, and time and again, as we huddled there in misery, he wiped the moisture from his visor.

Dimly we heard the thud of running feet, and peering fearfully into the mists we saw it was our friend Nesro, who had been caught in the deadly storm and was belatedly racing to shelter. But even before we could call him to our Dome, he fell prey to the cursed climate. His footsteps faltered; his joints locked; he stumbled and fell headlong.

A horror gripped us. For a Kiosian to lie for more than minutes on that drenched ground meant certain ending. But we were helpless. To attempt a rescue without shedders, would only put us in the same plight.

Nadron lurched to his feet, and what he cried should convince his enemies that, whatever else his faults, he was no coward.

"Come!" he cried. "We must save him!"

But overlapping his words, came a cry from Nesro:

"No, comrades! It is better *one* should end than many—" His voice was feeble. "Open the refuge. I shall try to make it without my carrier."

We screamed in unison then: "No, Nesro—no! You can't possibly make it! The pelting death—"

But our pleas were vain. Desperately Nesro scurried from the rain-glistening cover of his carrier, flashed toward us, flaming like a pillar of crimson in the darkness. For an instant it seemed his madness might be crowned with success—but only for an instant. Then the raw and dreadful poison of the rain seeped through his feeble shield, a high, thin scream of pain rent our nerves to trembling tatters, and where Nesro had been, briefly there blossomed in the night a white incandescence unbearable to look at. Then—nothing.

SO ended Nesro. I was sad; but my grief was as naught compared to that of my friend the learned Yana Nadron. He moaned, and there in our tiny refuge cursed aloud, speaking Names which I dare not repeat.

"Now, woe and despair," he cried horribly, "upon the mocking gods who made us the weaklings we are! For we are at once masters of a world, and cringing servants to that world's every element. What matter that our intellect has built for us an empire, or

that with wit and wisdom we have plumbed the secrets of a universe? Our minds are living glories, but we hobble about our kingdom like cripples, poorest of all we hold in fee. Even those wild, breathing beasts who grub for worms beneath the stones dare face the forces which strike us low. Even such miserable clods as *that*—"

And he pointed a shaking hand toward the rain-soaked carrier abandoned by Nesro. It lay face down in a wind-lashed rivulet, motionless, reddening, ruined beyond repair. As we watched, there scampered from the woods a small air-breather. The furry creature sniffed hopefully about the carrier, then, scenting nothing wherewith to sate its revolting appetite, shuffled off, rain dripping from its pelt.

I shuddered and said reasonably: "But surely, Nadron, you would not barter your soul for the brute body of such a beast? True, the gods have ordained that we must pay a price for our mastery. We lack the physical stamina of these lower animals. But is not our superior intellect compensation enough?"

"And as for form and substance, we have made great progress. Our forefathers knew not how to build themselves tangible bodies. Today we encase ourselves in cleverly wrought metal carriers which perform all physical functions for us."

"Bah!" spat Nadron savagely. "Carriers which but accentuate our impotence. We garb ourselves in shells of forged metal and fancy we have gained mobility. But is this true? No! We have only succeeded in making ourselves slaves to the bodies we have wrought—" He laughed hollowly, mocking the chatter of the Clinic specialists: "Grease here—grease there—a drop of oil in the knee-joint. Replace lens—replace digits—repair rusted plate in the frontal lobe—"

"Still," I protested, "our metal bodies *do* enable us to get about more easily, perform tasks otherwise impossible—"

"And under what handicap?" he thundered. "In cold weather we shiver and tremble in our metal homes. In hot, our yielding rivets warp and melt. In dry weather our joints lock

with grating sand. In wet"—he paused and stared bitterly at the rusting carrier of Nesro—"we perish."

I said resignedly: "What you say is true, Nadron. But there is nothing to be done about it. I, for one, am content—"

"But I am not! There must be some way of living other than huddling pitifully caged in a metal carcass. There must be some other form of servant—"

He stopped abruptly, and I stared at him curiously.

"Yes, Yana?"

"Servant," he repeated. "Yes, that's it! Another kind of servant. One which does not melt in the heat and freeze in the cold, shivel in the drouth and rot in the rain. A servant by Nature adapted to combat Nature's terrors. That is what our race needs—what we must have—will have!"

"What? But where will you find such a servant?"

Nadron pointed a creaking arm to the mist-shrouded forests. "Out there, my brother."

"In the forest? You mean—"

"Yes! The creatures of flesh The air-breathers."

I laughed. Despite my pain and misery, I laughed. It was just too ridiculous, the concept of training those tiny furry beasts to perform for us our manual tasks.

"Oh, come now, Nadron, you can't be serious! Those miserable, dwarfed weaklings?"

"Bear within them," he said slowly, shrewdly, "the seed of animate life. That is all that matters, my friend."

The germ of life. Their size, their form—such things are unimportant. These I will change to meet our own requirements. I will raise them from all fours, remold their small beast brains to give them intellect. Yea, even this I, the Yana Nadron, shall do. And I so pledge unto the gods."

A strange uneasiness filled me, I knew not quite why. And I said thoughtfully: "Have a care, O Yana, lest these same gods take offense at your intentions. I am no metaphysician, but it seems to me there are certain limits beyond which one may not go without presuming too greatly. The altering of form, the giving of wisdom, these are feats which only the gods may accomplish with impunity. It is not for ones like thee and me—"

But I fear the Yana did not hear my words. Too intent was he on the vision which had come to him. There in the wet and darkness beside me he stirred, and his voice was harsh with grandeur.

"Yes, this shall I do," he proclaimed. "I shall build a new race, a race of servants obedient to us, their masters."

MANY time-periods passed ere next I saw the Yana Nadron. We of Kios are a recluse race, separate by nature and individual in our working habits. And I was busy with duties of my own. The Grand Council had commissioned me to perfect a form of spacecraft wherein our colonists might hurtle the darkness of space to the as yet unconquered planets of our double sun. With this tremendous labor was I occupied.

So the moons waxed and waned. Thrice changed the seasons, warm and cold, and wet and dry and wet again. And in the privacy of his own Dome laboratory the Yana Nadron pursued his secret labors in solitude.

And then one double twilight, when the crimson rays of the smaller sun, sinking in the north, merged weird shadows with the pale green luminescence of the greater sun's southern setting, there came to me in my workshop the Yana Nadron.

Excitement was strong within him, and he cried without word of formal

greeting: "My friend, would you behold a marvel to strike awe into the boldest heart?"

"Why, who would not?" I laughed.

"Then come!" cried the Yana excitedly. "Then come with me, and wonder and behold!"

And he led the way to his own Dome. . . .

Let me here say that never dwelt a scientist amidst such great refinement as that with which Nadron had surrounded himself. For his Dome comprised not a single chamber, as is the case with most of us. His was a mighty structure subdivided into numerous rooms and niches, each dedicated to its own purpose.

Once we passed through a chemical laboratory, its shelf-lined walls aglisten with innumerable rows of vials and beakers; again we crossed a library whose musty tomes spanned the whole range of living knowledge; elsewhere sprawled chambers filled with electrical apparatus, surgical equipment and curious machines of which I could not even guess the purpose. I yet recall traversing a steaming room wherein was sunk a hydroponic tank whence emanated an oddly noisome scent. I cannot speak with surety of what this tank contained, but I do recall that as we passed, from its oily depths there flopped a strange, amorphous something which scrabbled with nailless paws at the walls of its prison, and bubbled piteous plaints in a voice of tongueless horror.

But past all these his chambers of experiment the Yana led me swiftly, until we came at last to the furthestmost door. Before this he paused for an instant, dramatically. And then:

"Here," he proclaimed, "is my final testing chamber. Here the fulfillment of my great invention."

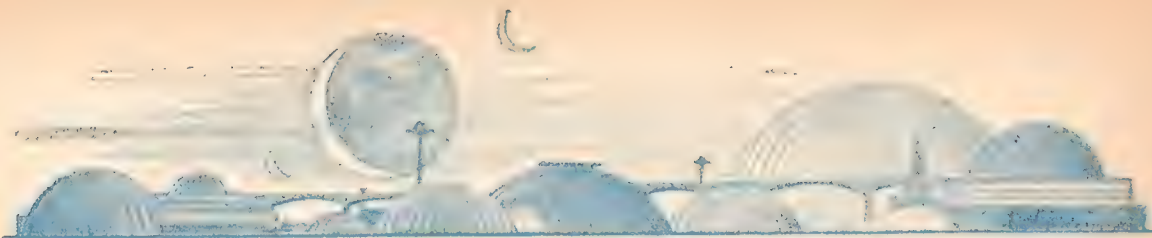
He flung open the door and bade me enter. . . .

Well might he glory in what he here had wrought. For frankly do I confess that my eyes, following the motion of his hand, widened in astonishment at what they beheld.

This was no mere room. It was a vast Dome-covered acreage, formed to the semblance of a veritable living forest. Nay, more than forest—say, rather, a garden spot, a paradise. For its growth was as various as any wrought by Nature, yet with such thought had the Yana Nadron conceived and carried out its purpose, that here he had brought into being a landscape more beautiful than ever was sown by Nature's heedless hand.



The furry creature sniffed hopefully about the carrier.



Here a high grove cast towering green spires upward. There, through mossy banks bedecked with fragrant flowers, purred a tiny crystal brooklet. Elsewhere, rimmed by lush meadows, sprawled lazy hills and flatlands ripe with grain. Small beasts stirred in the forests, their restless murmurings a balm to weary spirits; fish flashed and rippled in the eddies of the stream, and from some distant grove came the thrilling cadence of birdsong raised in joy.

I stared at Nadron, stunned with wonderment. "It is," I cried aloud, "—it is indeed a miracle you have created here, wise Yana! What beauty and what taste! The Grand Council will be astonished."

"You think so?" he asked, pleased at my praise. "You really think so?"

"How could they be otherwise? By the gods, Nadron, would that the whole of our planet were as delightful as this small niche you have created beneath your laboratory Dome. What joy would be ours, what wonderful existence, if all Kios were such a garden spot as this! A shielded wonderland wherein we might dwell without fear of the natural terrors which beset us: heat and cold, drought and murderous rainfall.

"You said you would awe me, my friend. You have succeeded beyond your wildest imaginings. I humble myself before a master artist who has created perfection."

"But," said Nadron, "you have not yet seen all."

"There is *more* to see?"

"Much more. Not yet have you seen the greatest of my accomplishments. Come."

And he led the way down a tiny path curving through the wilderness. As we neared a grove, deep-nestled in the rolling hills, he called in gentle tones: "My son! My son! Where art thou, child of my making?"

And before I could question this strange salutation, a movement broke the silence of the glade. Branches parted, and from a leafy bower stepped a vision which stunned and left me speechless.

IT was a living creature, an animal of flesh and blood, an air-breather walking upright on its two hind limbs! Truly had Nadron boasted he would mold a creation in his own image. So closely did its shape resemble that of

the carriers which we of Kios build for our own usage that for an instant I believed it a gigantic hoax; I thought Nadron had, to amuse me, coated the carrier of a friend or assistant with pigment.

Then I saw this monster's body was not forged of sturdy metals like our own, but was soft, pulsating, and resilient. The curious dark growth of fur which covered its head, its breast and its arms and legs, grew naturally, so it seemed, from its very flesh. It breathed with great gulping motions of the chest, and its wide, natural optics were not sensitive visors such as those through which *we* see, but the natural eyes of animals!

These now shifted from one to the other of us in mute appraisal as the sensate beast asked: "Yes, my lord? You called me?"

Nadron asked, his voice warm with benevolent paternalism: "Where hast thou been, my son?"

The creature replied quietly: "I wandered through the fields, my nostrils savoring the fragrance of the flowers. I walked amongst the trees and touched them, marveling at their strong, rough firmness. Beside the brook I knelt, and drank of its waters. I tasted the berries of the vines and the fruit of the trees, and gave thanks unto thee, O my lord, who brought these things into being, and myself unto this paradise."

"And art thou happy, my son?"

"Happy?" The beast's blank stare questioned the very meaning of the word.

"Lack you anything for which your heart hungers?"

"Nay, nothing, lord. Save perhaps—"

The Yana's creation faltered. His voice stopped, his eyes fell, as if he were abashed at his own temerity in questioning the perfection of this garden.

Nadron demanded, "Then there is something, my child?"

"There is—one small thing, my lord. It is scarce worth mentioning, but—" The creature shuffled in embarrassment. "I am lonely, O Yana. I walk at evening in the cool of the garden, seeing about me the bright-colored birds, the rustling insects, and the beasts of the fields; and lo! for each of these there is one to be companion. Only I, of all the creatures who inhabit this paradise, am mateless."

"But—" frowned Nadron.

"I question not thy bounty, O great Nadron," said the creature hastily. "In thy infinite wisdom thou knowest best what shall and shall not be given thy servant. Still—"

He faltered to silence, head bowed servilely before the pondering Yana. But I could not help noticing that his glance darted swiftly up from beneath shyly lowered lashes.

I said, with a touch of pique, I am afraid: "This is a strange being you have created, Nadron. Though he lives in paradise, still he dares question the perfection thereof."

But Nadron said gently, slowly: "Nevertheless, there is wisdom in what he suggests. It was much effort to create this being which I have named He, my friend. It were folly to attempt creation of scores, hundreds, thousands, of others like this one, in my laboratory. Perhaps in his innocent demanding, he has offered the proper solution to this problem. A mate? But yes, of course! I need but create for him a mate, and then—in the fullness of time—he and she shall produce for Kios the race of servants for which they were conceived. . . .

"Very well, my son." He turned again to the waiting creature. "It shall be as you ask. On the morrow come to the room where first thou awakened. There, out of thy substance and my wisdom, shall I create a second like thyself, but of another sex. And now—farewell."

SO left I Nadron's garden. But this time I did not allow so long to pass before returning. My curiosity was stirred, not only as to how the Yana's magnificent experiment would turn out, but also as to what form of creature he would create to be his beast's companion. Moreover, when it was bruited about that I, alone of all Kios, had been invited to visit Nadron's laboratory, great interest was aroused, and I was summoned before the Grand Council, there to report on that which I had seen.

I told them in glowing terms of the wonders he had wrought, and greatly did they marvel. Great Kron, who heads our Council, said wonderingly: "Intelligent life in fleshly form? But yes! That is the answer to our problem! The Yana Nadron is a sage spirit, and mighty is this thing he seeks to accomplish."

Another cried rapturously: "Now dawns the long-dreamed-of liberation of our race! When this new herd of servants has been bred, then will we of Kios be free to rid ourselves once and for all of the metal carriers in which we house ourselves. Secure beneath great Domes, we may rest ourselves in easeful pursuit of pleasure and knowledge, while our servants, not sensitive as we to climatic changes, can carry out our instructions."

But still another, older than the rest, spoke dubiously.

"I do not know," he said. "This is, in truth, a mighty thing the Yana has attempted. Perhaps it is *too* mighty. The gods, in their omnipotence, frown upon our seeking to delve too deeply into certain mysteries. And methinks already Nadron has tampered overmuch in a secret and occult lore—the creation of living souls."

"Souls?" laughed one of our younger councilors. "But how can there be souls in bestial bodies?"

"Where life alone exists, perhaps the soul is absent. But our brother has told us that this creature of Nadron not only moves and obeys, but voices his own thoughts. That bespeaks intelligence. And where exists intelligence may also be a soul. If this be true—"

The speaker shook his head gravely. But the rest of us just laughed. As we all knew, old Saddryn was ever a pessimist and a crier-of-woe.

But Kron in his infinite wisdom took heed of even this gloomy warning, and bade me continue my visits to Nadron's laboratory, that I might keep the Council informed as to the progress of the experiment.

THUS it was that but a short time later, once again I strode with the Yana through his delightful garden.

As we neared the glade wherein it was the creature's custom to lurk, I sensed a subtle change. What it was I could not first detect, whether of sight or sound or simply atmosphere. Then suddenly, and with a sense of sharpened curiosity, I realized what it was. When first I had strode this pathway, a part of its beauty had been the fresh untrammelled wildness of its growth—the helter-skelter confusion of vines and trees and bushes, the lavish abundance with which bright flowers sprang from unexpected places, the haphazard delight of natural beauties seen amidst natural surroundings.

But now all that was changed. The pathway over which we approached no longer twisted aimlessly beneath arboreal bowers. It had been carefully scraped and straightened; the rank brush flanking it had been trimmed to a semblance of order; the low and overhanging boughs had been cut back to allow the wanderer headroom. Beauty was still present, but no longer

was it the clean and unspoiled improvisation of nature; it was a neat and regimented orthodoxy, pleasing to the eye, but somehow strangely stifling to the senses.

I commented on this to Nadron, and he smiled quietly.

"That," he said, "is the doing of the She—an orderly creature, that one!" And he shook his head with almost reluctant admiration.

"Her doing? Then you have finished her?"

"Oh, yes. As a matter of fact, I finished two of them. The first one dwelt here with him for a while, but I had to—" he sighed—"remove her. She was unsatisfactory. She was too much like the He. Care-free, adventurous, enamored of gay wanderings and pleasant sloth, rather than pleasantly intent upon her duties. Together they were more companions than mates. They laughed and played together through the livelong day, and accomplished nothing. So I was forced to make another She, one with instincts and desires unlike his own."

"But I should think," I demurred, "this would not be to his liking? After all, a companion is what he asked for."

The Yana chuckled.

"What he asked for, but not what he really wanted. You should study psychology, my friend, to realize that in nature, even as in the electrical art, it is opposites which attract. This second She is so unlike him that he is drawn to her as by a magnet. She baffles and confuses him—and brings him running. She commands, and he obeys; she demands, and he fulfills. With the motion of a finger she exacts his most arduous labor. She is a bother to him, I fear, and a source of sore trouble—but for her rare words of praise, he has done more actual work than ever since I placed him in this garden."

"Then," I said, comprehending, "you followed the example of the insect? Made her larger than him, and stronger, that she might enforce her demands?"

"On the contrary," denied Nadron, "I made her— But see for yourself." And he called: "My children!"

The bower parted, and into its opening strode his twain creations.

In a glance I saw it was as he said. The male beast was subtly changed. There was a new assurance in his features, a confidence which might have been born of his newfound capabilities; but there was at the same time a something else I could not quite decipher. It was a reserve, a furtiveness which had not been present when first I saw him. But more than this first glance I saw not, for my attention was drawn and riveted to the creature's new companion. And strange as it may seem, coming from one uncorporeal as myself, I must confess that

even I was fascinated by this, the Yana Nadron's later creation.

For he had combined in her not only the sturdiness and the nobility of the male, but something subtler still; a grace, a charm, a winsomeness and allurements far out of proportion to the small physique with which he had endowed her.

SHORTER by half a head was she than her mate, slighter boned and more fragile, whiter of skin. But one could tell at a glance that here was strength not built of sinew but of purpose. She bore herself lightly, walking on the balls of her feet with lissom grace, and she seemed all sweet docility; yet curiously, she spoke for both.

"You called, my lord?" she asked.

"It is nothing," said Nadron. "I wished but to see you and show you to my friend. You are happy here, my children?"

"Yes, my lord," said the She. "Of course, there are a few things—"

"Yes?" asked Nadron.

The male spoke querulously.

"She wants the stream-bed widened, that we may swim therein. She thinks, too, that I should transplant berry bushes nearer to our glade, that we need not hunt so far for provender. And we have talked"—he cast a dubious glance at his mate—"that is, *She* has talked much of our building some sort of dwelling."

"She?" laughed Nadron. "Always *She*? What is *your* desire in these matters, my first-made?"

"Well—" said the male hesitantly.

"I have pointed out to him," interrupted the She in sweet and lilting tones, "that only by doing these things can we prove to the lesser beasts that we are their superiors and their rightful masters. It is true, my lord, is it not, that we *are* their masters?"

I asked impatiently: "And since when do beasts rule beasts?" But the Yana silenced me with a gesture.

"There is logic to that. It is right and proper that one animal should exercise dominion over its inferiors. If your mate wants these things, my son, I see no harm in your providing them for her."

"Oh, very well," said the male petulantly. "But it is wearisome work, and I like it not. When the *other* She was here, we roamed where we would for berries, swam at chance when we found a widening of the stream; we laughed and played, and found no need of stifling shelter."

"Like," laughed the second-made gayly and, I thought, perhaps a bit tauntingly, "like two happy and care-free children. All day they played, and in the cool of the night they curled apart, each to his own soft nest of ferns, and slumbered in cool companionship. Of course—" And she laughed again, flexing her muscles

"No!" cried the Yana Nadron. "There is one door through which you may not pass. This is the Law."



smoothly, languorously; until that moment I had not realized how strong was the animal within her. "Of course, if that is what you want, the master can no doubt bring back the other She—"

But a swift light, warm and hungry, brightened in the male's eyes, and he shook his head.

"No," he decided; "I shall do as she asks, my lord."

"Very well," said Nadron; "it is your decision to make. And now farewell, my children. We must go."

But even as we turned, the She addressed us, humble as ever and sweetly supplicating, but with a cunning determination, none the less.

"Master—"

"Yes, my daughter?"

"There is another thing—another small thing. We are humble creatures, ignorant and unworthy of your attention. We would not trouble you for counsel and advice on every tiny thing we wish to do. Is it not possible that when need arises, we may be allowed to enter into the chamber wherein are stored the books of knowledge and learning? If we could but do this, we

need not waste time and effort learning to do things wrongly, but may build and create in proper fashion."

"No!" cried the Yana Nadron. "No, my daughter, that is one thing you may *not* do. All this wide garden is open unto you: its hills and valleys, glades and rivulets. But there is one door through which you may not pass, that which leads to my private laboratory. This is the Law, and the only Law I have laid down unto you."

"But—" pouted the She enticingly. "Let us speak of it no more," cried Nadron sternly. "You have heard my word. And now, good-by."

And we left them standing there, he shrugging and resigned, she with head lowered. Yet as we left, I felt her eyes upon us, shrewd and bold beneath their lowered lashes.

YOU may wonder, my brothers, why waste I so much wordage on the telling of this. Believe me, it is but to demonstrate that *never* did the Yana Nadron—as has been accused by his enemies—conspire with his creations against our own race for the overthrow of our empire. Who says

that, speaks untruth. The Yana came near to bringing disaster upon us, true; but innocently, and because, being the soul of righteousness himself, he could not comprehend the cunning of the beasts he had created. . . .

From this point on, you are familiar with the facts of the case. You know how, on the Night of the Four Moons, it was strangely noted that the laboratory Dome of Nadron glowed with the reflection of a ruddy flame throughout the evening. It is unfortunate that no investigation was made of this at the time, but understandable. We of Kios are a recluse race, self-sufficient and solitary by nature. Few knew that the Yana Nadron was not in his laboratory, but visiting afar in search of new equipment with which to stock his depleted stores.

All those of us, including myself, who maintain residence within sight of our brother's laboratory, remember well the subsequent series of incidents emanating from that spot: Once the sound of explosion—still another time the clamorous pounding of metal upon metal as if a dozen of us, carrier-clad, vied in games of strength.

But none knew nor guessed the import of these sights and sounds.

Knowledge of dawning peril came to us only when one morn we awakened to discover the Dome of our neighbor Lato smashed and in smoldering ruins. When startled friends braved the wreckage to learn Lato's fate, they were grieved to find Lato's carrier lying amidst the wreckage. When the headpiece was forced open, it was found Lato himself was ended. His volatile energy had been expended in a single gigantic burst of flame which fused the metal wherein he had maintained residence.

Even after this disaster no suspicion attached to Nadron's labors. And certainly none dreamed that his creations were in any way responsible. Not even when, a few nights later, the nearby Dome of the Councilor Palimon was found to be rudely split and flooded with poisonous oxide of hydrogen was it guessed that the animals could be responsible for such a brutal attack upon their overlords.

Palimon was, of course, ended. His spirit seared and shriveled by the lethal liquid, he could tell us nothing. What dreadful tale of agony he might have related is better left unguessed.

And then, at terrible last, came revelation as to the cause of these disasters. This occasion was, as you will remember, the destruction of the Dome of the Grand Council itself. Like the other events, it occurred in the dark of night, when no Kiosian

dares venture forth, and horrible was its accomplishment.

First came, as had before, a violent explosion. Then in its wake rose a fearful sea of flame, sweeping the council-hall and slaying all who dwelt beneath the Dome. And when blistering fire had gutted the ruined hemisphere, came the dank night wind, bearing with it lethal rains to destroy such life as might remain within the halls.

It is by sheer chance that on this night scarce half the Council was foregathered; else might a blow have been struck from which our empire might never have recovered. But as it was, great Kron and half his Councilors had been in my Dome inspecting my new and nearly completed spacecraft. Shedder-garbed against the night-mists, they were returning to their dwelling when the explosion trembled the ground beneath their feet. As they spurred their carriers to top speed, they—or I should say we, for I was with them—reached the scene in time to see outlined against the flickering flames two bodies. These, like our own, were carrier-clad; and at the sight of them Kron burst forth with a terrible cry.

"Traitors!" he roared. "Two of our own people—traitors! Now the gods forfend that I should have lived to see this awful day! Then the other explosions were *not* accidents; they were deliberate murder! Woe upon Kios that has spawned such vermin—"

Then I stopped him with a shrill, excited cry. For upon sight of us, the

two marauders had turned and raced away. And though the taller of these could not be told from one of our own brethren, by the pace and motion of the other—an awkward, gliding run—I instantly recognized and knew the nature of our attackers.

"Nay, these are no children of Kios, O Kron," I cried, "but the beasts—the beasts of the Yana Nadron, turned like serpents against their masters!"

Great Kron cried loud in his thunderous rage; then turned he to the royal messenger. "Gavrill!" he ordered. "Sound now your trumpet all over the land. Bid Nadron hither instantly. Mikel, rouse your troops!"

And then I knew the fury of great Kron, for not in a score of centuries had the gleaming troops of Mikel been ordered into action. But without a word, the commander of our armed forces turned and sped toward the armory wherein were carefully stored against the hour of need those dreadful weapons which our race holds ever in reserve.

WHAT happened next, you know. The Yana, being summoned, came immediately. Nor waited he even upon the slow movements of his mechanical carrier. Risking the night-mists and the dark, with the speed of light he flashed from the other end of the land in his natural form. We saw him approach from afar, a pillar of flame in the blackness.

When he learned what had befallen, a cry of pain and anguish broke from him. Like a patient parent he might have denied the evil intent of his children, were not the proof of their mischief a smoldering wreckage before him.

Then said Kron: "Now great is the evil your creations have wrought, O Yana. But greater still shall be their punishment. For even now our warriors sweep forth to destroy them—"

But the Yana pleaded: "Wait, O Kron! Stay yet your hand till I have learned what lust inspired this evil. Let me go to my children and learn from their lips the reason—"

And Kron nodded.

"So be it. But mark you well—"

Nadron turned to me beseechingly.

"And you, my friend? Will you come with me?"

So together, for the last time, went we two into the paradise which the Yana had created within his Dome.

Within, the paths were cool, the grottoes shadowed, and the soft brook purled through mossy silences. No



nightbird sang, but from the thicket came the soft and lazy cadences of restless insects. Together but alone, unspeaking, we trod the paths marked out by the He and She. And as we neared the glade wherein it was the creatures' wont to dwell, the Yana Nadron raised his voice—in stern command, but in sadness too, I thought.

It is perhaps meaningful that in this hour of sorrow he should have called only to the first of his creations.

"My son," he called. "My son! Where art thou, O child of mine own making?"

There came no answer but the rippling of the breeze through the boughs, and the rustling of a frightened thing in the high grass.

"My son," cried Nadron again. "Where art thou? Know you not the voice of your lord and maker?"

And then suddenly, a dim whiteness in the shadows, rose the crouching figure of the He from the brush before us. And I saw with sick horror that he was not, as ever before, clad only in his own fleshly raiment, but that his body was shielded within the greaved and bucklered harness of a carrier such as we ourselves wear.

He spoke, and his voice was meek: "You called, my lord?"

The Yana's voice was stricken.

"My son, my son!" he grieved. "Wherefore hast thou donned this raiment?"

The male's voice was a thick mumbling in the darkness. He spoke in half apology, half defiance.

"It was the She, my lord. She told me I was naked and a weakling, and I was ashamed. Together we built these garments, that we might be strong and mighty."

"Built," repeated Nadron, "those garments? But where, O creature of little knowledge, learned you the secret of such things?" Then in a tone of sudden understanding: "You learned this not in the garden, my son, but—elsewhere."

The beast bowed miserably. "It was the She, my lord," he whined. "It was She who—"

Then cried the Yana in a terrible voice:

"Let the She stand forth!"

And suddenly she was there, rising from the thicket beside her mate. She too was garbed in carrier-metal, but her headpiece was removed, and

never thought I to see such boldness in the eyes of a creature bred to serfdom. On her features was scorn—pride, anger and rebellion.

And she cried defiantly: "Yea, even I, my lord; it was I who showed the He how to build the garments. I too, who read the books and learned the secret of making the flame which explodes, the fire that destroys, of smashing the Masters' Domes, that the night-waters might seep in and end them—"

"These things," said the Yana in awful tones, "you could learn in but one place. In my library, the door of which was forbidden you. But how entered you there? The door was locked and bolted."

The male creature shifted nervously.

"There was a grill in the door, O Master," he explained. "Through this the She sent our friend the serpent, with instructions to unlock the portal to us."

Then Nadron trembled with awful rage, and his voice was like the rolling of great thunders.

"Now cursed be you!" he cried. "For you have defied my commands, and in opening the forbidden gate tasted the fruits of evil knowledge I forbade you! And cursed be the serpent who aided your rebellion. May he be eyed with endless loathing by all who spring from your loins in countless generations to come! For surely I say unto you, never shall it be forgotten what you have this night done. Neither by yourselves, nor by your children, nor by your children's children's children unto the end of time."

"Here," and his voice broke with the intensity of his passion—"here did I build for you a garden of wondrous beauty, a paradise wherein was all for which your hearts might hunger. But it was not enough. You would escape its walls and set yourselves up as masters, even over those who created you. Henceforth I wash my hands of you. You are a broken reed, an experiment which failed. I disclaim myself of you and your beast-born ambitions!"

"Mikel!" And he called to the warrior captain who now, with gleaming sword held high, had appeared at the gate of the garden. "Do what you must, Mikel!"

BUT Mikel said quietly and with a great sorrow: "My orders have been changed, O Yana Nadron."

"Changed?"

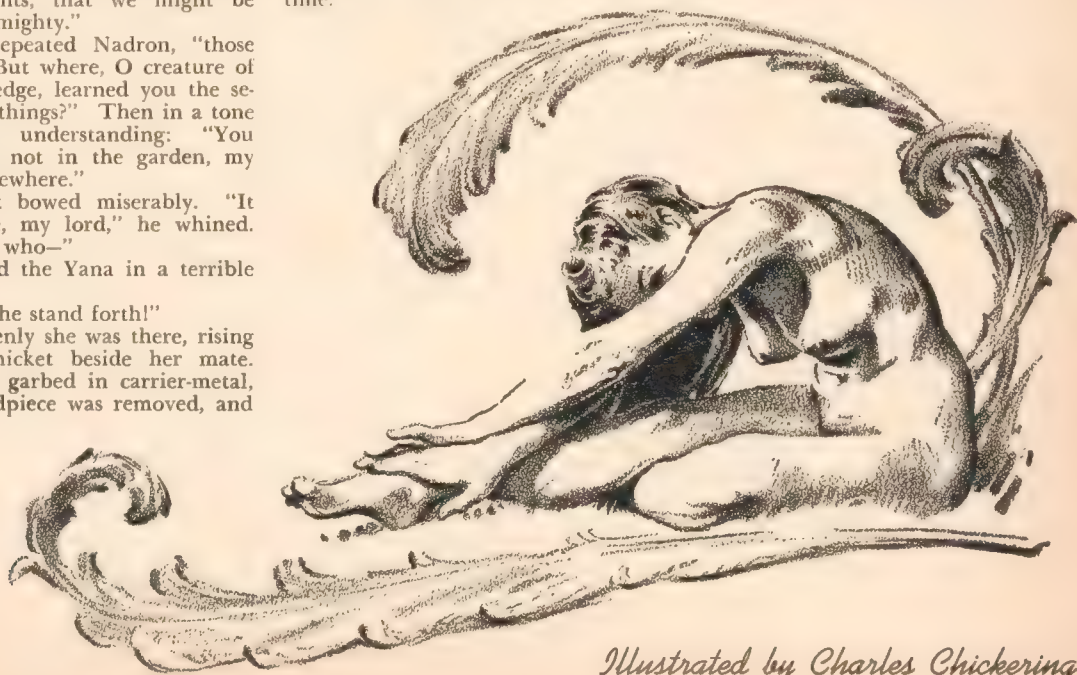
"Yes. Kron has decided that mere ending is not a fitting punishment for that which these creatures have done."

"But," I gasped, "if not ending, then what—"

It was Kron himself who answered.

"According to our laws, O Yana Nadron, it is forbidden that any living creature with a soul be brought by our hands to mortal ending. And in council sage have we decided that by their very rebellion have these creatures proven the existence of their souls."

"Yet since we must rid ourselves of their evil presence, there is one alternative. They shall be placed in the spacecraft recently completed by our friend here, and transported across the everlasting darkness of space to such bourne as may be far-



Illustrated by Charles Chickering

thetst remote from our own planet. Where this journey may end, I cannot say nor guess; but somewhere may be another planet where you and your ill-spawned experiments can exist beyond our ken and finding, until the gods, in the fullness of their mercy, see fit to rule otherwise."

The Yana Nadron whispered shakily: "Not only they, but—myself!"

And said great Kron sadly: "Even so. For was it not you, O Yana, who brought them into being?"

THUS ended the matter of the Yana Nadron and those beasts which, through the greatness of his wisdom, he undertook to remold as fleshly servants in the image of himself. It is a sad and sickening story, and one I would not tell save that some critics have seen fit to cast aspersions upon the truly noble character of our exiled brother.

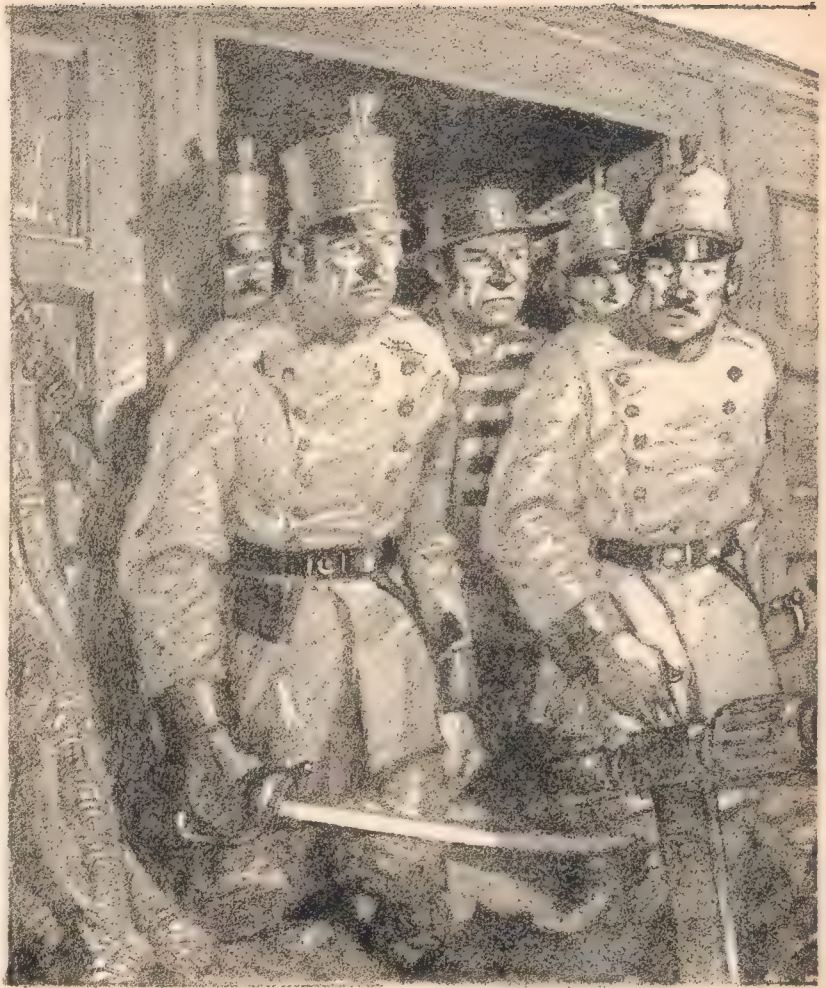
So ended, too—so far as our knowledge extends—the existence of the Yana and his creations. As had been commanded, they were placed within my spacecraft, therein forever banished from fair Kios. Where, when, and how their journey ended, or if ever, I know not. Perhaps they wander still, their craft a tiny mote in the vastness of all-swaddling space. Perhaps somewhere they met cruel ending in the flaming heart of a star. Perhaps—and this I hope—they found somewhere a planet, and upon it made a new home.

However this may be, I cannot say. But this I know: Those do great wrong who criticize the Yana Nadron, naming him fiend and traitor. Never lived a nobler man, nor one with greater ambition for the welfare of his own race. That he sinned is undeniable, but his sin was only that of tampering with forces too great for him. For as all know, there are limits beyond which one is forbidden to probe. And they who seek to know, with the gods, the secret of the creation of life are ever doomed to failure.

It was a wondrous dream the Yana Nadron dreamed. But there was one thing he failed to take into consideration: the animal nature of those he tried to endow with intelligence. Never, never—though they raised themselves from all fours to walk like beings—could they slough off these animal instincts. It was that which the Yana could not foresee, and that which caused his downfall.

So—they are gone, the Yana Nadron and they whom he created: the male to whom he gave the name A-dam, and the She who was called Eve. Yet mourn I my exiled brother, and ever is my soul sick within me, when I think on that which overthrew him—

On the cunning—ah, the dreadful, dreadful cunning of the beasts. . .



DANGER IS MY

A pirate goes through hell and high water to rescue a lady in this story by the author of "Desert Blood."

CAPTAIN PANTHO O'REILLY lurked like a marauding wolf in the darkness outside a window of Felipe Rubio's tavern, the Casa de Toros, and gazed with decidedly wolfish eyes at the gay scene within.

Tall, swarthy, hawk-faced, the son of his Castilian mother rather than his Killarney father, Captain O'Reilly studied that scene with expert care. After long weeks on shipboard, its gayety allured him. He had no difficulty in identifying Camila Flon; Ma-

teo's description had been admirably exact, and he saw at once that she deserved all of Mateo's praise. But at the last meeting of the Independence Committee the question of the girl's services had come up, and it had been decided that the cause of Mexican freedom was too precious to be risked with one who might be a Spanish spy. What bothered O'Reilly most at the moment, however, was a big black-bearded naval lieutenant whom he took to be a Portuguese, sitting at a table with a mestizo woman.



MEAT and DRINK

by Herbert Ravenel Sass

The spadelike shape of this man's beard twanged against some obscure cord of memory. The ocean wasn't, after all, a very large place. Captain O'Reilly couldn't rid himself of the impression that somewhere this Portuguese and he had met.

If that was true, to enter the inn might be to stick his neck into a noose. He cursed the spade-bearded one under his breath; then, as he studied the man, he became aware of an encouraging fact: the Portuguese was well primed with Rubio's aguardiente; a

few more swallows, and the fiery liquor might put him under the table. Captain O'Reilly decided to await that possible solution, and meanwhile his bright blue eyes—the only external feature of him that matched the Irish part of his name—devoted themselves to Camila Flon.

She shone, he said to himself, like a brilliant flower of the *flamboyan* or flame tree amid lesser blooms; and tonight her vivid beauty had a glamorous setting. Felipe Rubio, a shrewd and progressive man, drew to his fa-

mous *fonda* on the road to Mexico City the most celebrated charmers of opulent Vera Cruz—sultry-eyed Spanish actresses, glittering lights-o'-love from the Viceregal palaces, mysterious veiled ladies who might be the pleasure-loving daughters of rich aristocrats seeking new kinds of diversion. Some masked and some unmasked, some Spanish and some mestizo, ivory shoulders and amber shoulders, they sat at small tables under rose-shaded lights with a mixture of city dandies, Spanish officers from the ships in harbor and

swarthy *hacendados* from the hills. Captain O'Reilly looked them over with the eager pleasure of a connoisseur who for too long a time has been deprived of all such pleasures. After which those blue eyes of his, so startling by contrast with his dark skin and black hair, returned once more to the girl whom his young midshipman, Mateo Reyes, had recommended—unsuccessfully, however—to the Revolutionary Committee.

She was, he decided, an Andaluza—a girl of the true Andalusian blood. Her face, somewhat thinner than the types he normally admired, nevertheless compelled him powerfully; her body was long and lithe as a dancer's should be. A red rose glowed in her jet hair, her black mantilla was fringed with orange, in her ivory cheeks he caught at times a glint of gold. She sat facing his window at one of the nearer tables with a thick-set young man in close-fitting dark-green jacket and slashed trousers.

This man would be Vicente Solís, O'Reilly concluded, remembering what Mateo had reported to the Committee. But Vicente engaged him only for an instant. What now absorbed him was Camila's eyes.

Captain O'Reilly considered himself a student of eyes and for some minutes he studied this girl's eyes with an increasing interest. Something was wrong there, something was seriously wrong. It might be some private crisis, or (if Mateo was right about the girl) it might be something of importance to the Revolutionist cause. He began to doubt the Committee's wisdom in dropping this girl abruptly after Mateo had made a beginning of using her service. Feeling deserted, she might turn informer—if, of course, she wasn't already one of the Spanish Viceroy's secret agents. It might be well to have a word with her, draw her out more skillfully than Mateo—a poor hand with women—had managed to do.

He glanced impatiently at the spade-bearded Portuguese lieutenant who was the immediate obstacle to his entering the inn, and saw with gratification that the man was trying to rise.

THE Portuguese got to his feet with difficulty and began to weave across the room. By a miracle he managed to make his way safely amid the tables until he reached the one where Camila and Vicente Solís were seated. Grinning drunkenly at Camila, he said something to her, and at once Vicente sprang up and struck him in the chest. It was not a heavy blow, but the *aguardiente* had done its work; the Portuguese toppled backward and lay still.

At a word from Felipe Rubio behind the bar, two attendants lifted him and conducted him, struggling feebly, into an inner room; and simultaneous-

ly Captain O'Reilly saw Rubio nod to Camila.

She hesitated, and again O'Reilly seemed to see desperation in her eyes. Then she threaded her way amid the tables to the middle of the room and took her station there, hands on her hips, head thrown back. There was



"It's the pirate, Pancho O'Reilly!" he roared. "We have him now!"

a ripple of applause. Rubio began strumming a guitar behind the bar, and presently Camila's body began to move.

It was a motion as smooth at first as flowing water, slow, sinuous, like a leopardess languid after sleep. But as Rubio's music quickened, it quickened also; swiftly it became a passionate flamenco, most intoxicating of all the dances of Spain. Captain O'Reilly, his eyes close to the window, laughed happily. This was a heaven-sent opportunity. It would be the spectacular kind of entrance that he loved.

A quiet colorless fellow like Mateo wouldn't have a chance with this flamelike Andaluza. O'Reilly moved quickly through the darkness to make sure that his horse, a nag purchased in Vera Cruz, was still standing where he had left it. Then he walked to the door of the tavern and rapped loudly.

The music stopped. After a moment the door was flung open. Those within saw him standing on the threshold—tall, wide-shouldered, swarthy, wearing the crimson jacket of a Mexi-

can gentleman, his brown hand resting on his sword-hilt. His aquiline face wore a smile, and his eyes, narrowed now so that their blueness was not so startling, roved here and there about the room. Imperceptibly they lingered on Camila Flon standing relaxed in the open space amid the tables; then they passed to Felipe Rubio, his guitar still balanced in his hand.

"Some of your white wine, Señor Innkeeper," he said. "I've heard in

Guadalupe, where I live, that it's the best in Mexico. . . . But wait! I see I've interrupted a dance."

He swept off his wide silver-braided hat and tossed it upon a chair. Smiling, he walked to where Camila stood, and bowed low before her. Standing beside her, he nodded to Rubio.

His meaning was unmistakable, and Rubio again began strumming his guitar. They danced, and the Casa de Toros had seldom seen such dancing, for the stranger danced almost as well as Camila, and his tall form was almost as supple as hers. He leaned toward her as he danced and whispered in her ear—to the onlookers it seemed that he was whispering a compliment.

"What is your secret, Flower of the Flame?" he asked. "I've been watching through the window, and I saw the trouble under your smile. Something makes you unhappy tonight—is it love or is it danger? Danger is my meat and drink. Tell me, that I may help you."

Without seeming to watch her, he watched her narrowly. He hadn't risked giving the Revolutionist countersign—"Food and drink are very dear"—exactly. That might have been fatal in case she was a Spanish spy, for it was possible that Mateo, no match for a clever woman, and believing in this girl absolutely, had told her the

countersign. Yet he had come near enough to it to give her a hint of his identity if she was both quick and trustworthy, as Mateo said.

She glanced at him swiftly. Her lips were parted to make some reply, when the inner door was flung open, and the Portuguese lieutenant lurched into the room. He stood swaying on his feet, staring stupidly about him. Then his bloodshot eyes came to rest on the dark face of the stranger in the middle of the room beside Camila Flon.

For a moment the Portuguese gazed fixedly, his lips sagging open. What he saw seemed to sober him. Suddenly with an oath he reached wildly for the hanger in his belt.

"Captain O'Reilly!" he roared. "It's Pancho O'Reilly, the pirate. I was a prisoner three days on his schooner. There's a reward of a thousand pesos . . . By St. Jago, we have him now!"

O'Reilly saw that the door was blocked, that the window was his only chance. A long leap carried him to it; snatching up a stool, he hurled it against the sash. He wrenched at the shattered sash with all the strength of his powerful arms and tore it away. In another half-second he might have leaped through the tall window to safety; but Vincente Solis, leading the rush, was too close.

O'Reilly whirled, and his clenched fist shot forward. Vincente fell. Two men stumbled over him, and as they went down, O'Reilly sprang upon a bench against the wall. Standing there with the window behind him and his sword flickering in front, his crimson-clad form towered above the mob hemming him in.

For an interval—one man against forty—he held them at sword's-length. It was a fine moment—one of his finest, he realized; and while it lasted, he gloried in it, savoring especially the knowledge that Camila Flon was getting an eyeful of his splendor. Then a thrown knife whizzed past him and stuck in the window frame, and next moment a ripe tomato exploded against the wall at his right.

More than the knife the tomato frightened him. If in this magnificent moment a tomato should hit him in the face! He had meant to throw a kiss to Camila before making his exit, but he forgot that now. He turned almost in panic, ducked through the open window, fell sprawling, scrambled to his feet and ran through the darkness to his horse.

The affair, Captain O'Reilly grumbled to himself an hour later, had ended a damned sight better than he deserved.

He'd had no business entering the tavern. He knew well enough that

if Camila Flon had been old and ugly he wouldn't have entered it. But what he'd done wasn't so indefensible as that implied. There was something about this woman, some quality which Mateo, even more inarticulate than usual where women were concerned, had been utterly unable to express.

O'Reilly was riding on through the darkness along the great highway that led eventually to Mexico City. There had been no pursuit; the revelers at the Casa had been in no mood for a nocturnal pirate hunt. Few of them, in fact, had believed the befuddled Portuguese. It was incredible that the notorious sea-hawk, Pancho O'Reilly, was ashore in Vera Cruz province.

Pressing on now toward the abandoned roadside hacienda where twice already he had met and conferred with Mateo, O'Reilly found it difficult to concentrate his thoughts upon the important business which had caused him to leave his schooner, the *Falcon*, tacking offshore and undertake this journey inland. He had joined the movement for Mexican independence mainly because the Spanish Viceroy's warships had been an annoying obstacle to his buccaneering operations; but the impending revolution didn't absorb him as it did the members of the Revolutionary Committee.

This woman, this Camila Flon! Again he found himself thinking of the flame tree's gorgeous blooms. Flower of the Flame, he had called her, and the name suited her. The poise of her head, the curve of her brows, the fire and the passion of her dancing!

HE went over in his mind what Mateo had told him about the girl. Mateo had lodged for two weeks at the Casa de Toros, and now that O'Reilly had seen her he had little doubt that she had twisted Mateo around her finger and pumped him dry. If this girl was a government agent—O'Reilly whistled softly.

She posed, it seemed, as the orphan niece of Felipe Rubio, the innkeeper, and ostensibly she earned her board by dancing for his guests. This wasn't a pose, Mateo had told the Committee, but the truth. Well, she had probably fooled Mateo; in his present mood O'Reilly was inclined to believe the

worst. Vincente Solis, son of a rich *hacendado*, was in love with her and Rubio was insisting upon the match. But she despised Vincente, Mateo said, and so far she had stood out against her uncle's will.

Captain O'Reilly shrugged. All this might be part of a deep game. The more he thought about it the more pleased he was that he hadn't spoken the telltale "*food and drink*" phrase exactly. If this girl had pumped Mateo, she knew all about that countersign of the Revolutionists and she'd have spotted him, O'Reilly, at once.

And probably that wasn't all she knew. If it were possible to stop her mouth—to get her aboard the *Falcon*.

Yes, that would be a good idea for more reasons than one. To safeguard the interests of the Revolution and for other reasons. It was, in fact, a fascinating idea. It would be difficult—but perhaps—Suddenly his musings were ended by the appearance of a horseman in the dim road in front of him. The man, apparently a hostler, loomed so abruptly out of the gloom that O'Reilly reined in to avoid collision. He peered fiercely at the other.

"Mateo!" he exclaimed in surprise. "Why are you here?"

"I couldn't wait at the old hacienda, Captain," Mateo told him, "because there wasn't time. The Viceroy has ordered Don Gaspar to sail for Florida at once. He is on the road now with his men and mules—they're hardly two hours behind me. So I slipped away and stopped at the hacienda only long enough to pick up my bag of sea-clothes which I hid there a month ago when I put on this hostler's rig. Then I hurried on to meet you."

Captain O'Reilly considered this information. It was completely satisfactory as far as it went. His trap for Don Gaspar de Morella, the new Governor of Florida, had long been ready; it was to learn when Gaspar would sail and other details that he had made this trip inland to confer with Mateo, who had obtained employment on the Morella estate as a hostler. Gaspar would board the ship *Santa Felipa* waiting in Vera Cruz harbor, and O'Reilly in his swift schooner, the *Falcon*, would attack the *Santa Felipa* probably the second night out from Vera Cruz. For Gaspar, he and the Revolutionary Committee cared nothing, but the gold which Gaspar was carrying with him to Florida would help to finance the Revolution which, they hoped, would free Mexico from the rule of Spain.

He fixed Mateo with a penetrating look. "How much," he asked sternly,



"did you tell that girl at the Casa de Toros—that Camila Flon?" He glared into Mateo's eyes and needed no further answer. "I feared so," he said gloomily. "Well, of course, the girl's a spy. She'll warn Gaspar if she can reach him."

Mateo shook his head and began to protest but O'Reilly paid no attention to him. His eyes had fallen on the soiled canvas bag strapped to the saddle of Mateo's mule, and an idea had come to him.

He was off his horse in an instant. Within a few minutes he stood arrayed in the patched and brine-stained togs—the *Falcon's* midshipmen wore the garb of ordinary seamen—taken from Mateo's sea-bag. The fit wasn't perfect but it would do—fortunately Mateo, too, was tall. In the younger man's leather jacket and tarry trousers, with some of the tar rubbed into his face for good measure, O'Reilly bore no resemblance to the crimson-suited dandy who had jumped through the window of the Casa de Toros.

He explained his plan, in so far as he had a plan, while stuffing his crimson suit into Mateo's bag and wrapping his sword in a saddle-cloth. The sun was already high when they reached the Casa de Toros, where a servant admitted them to a small end-room used by travelers of the lesser kind. They might, he told them, have coffee with tortillas in about an hour. Felipe Rubio entered the room after a time: his piglike eyes, resting momentarily on O'Reilly's tarry face, gave no hint of recognition, nor apparently did he recognize Mateo in his hostler's rig.

Rubio picked up a broom and went out. A few minutes later they heard him outside, his voice raised in anger.

O'Reilly rose and walked softly to the window. He saw Camila Flon sitting in the sunshine on a bench not ten feet from him. It was she that Rubio was haranguing. O'Reilly, unseen, could hear every word.

Why had she sent Vincente Solis away last night, Rubio demanded furiously. Why hadn't she married him long ago? What was she waiting for? Did she expect to catch some grandee of the Viceroy's court? She was a fool and worse than a fool and, by the Saints, he would teach her! Suddenly he struck her across the shoulders with his broom.

If this was play-acting, a drama put on for his benefit, it was most devilishly well done, O'Reilly told himself. He waited undecided by the window, while Camila Flon rose uncertainly as though that blow with the broom had dazed her. Beyond the girl and Rubio, O'Reilly saw three horsemen come around the bend of the road. The gold lace of their short, tight-fitting coats and the rich colors of their velvet capes glowed in the sunlight; and behind them, swinging into view from

around the bend, came rank after rank of red-jacketed soldiers, while behind these again rode other horsemen guarding a line of heavily loaded pack mules.

O'Reilly stared. Camila too saw the approaching procession, and Felipe Rubio, struck by the fixity of her gaze, turned his head to look.

"It is the Marquis de Morella," he explained excitedly; "the nobleman who has been appointed Governor of Florida. He must be on the way to Vera Cruz to take ship for the voyage."

RUBIO began bowing, for the three gentlemen at the head of the column were now almost at hand. They paid no attention to his antics, for their eyes were on Camila, and suddenly one of them spurred his horse forward and wheeled it in front of the two others.

"By St. Paul, Gaspar," he cried, "this is the finger of Fate! You were saying only just now that you had everything you needed to take with you to San Augustin excepting only a wife. And, presto, there she stands! She's only an innkeeper's wench, but in the wilds of Florida her ancestry won't matter; and you couldn't ask for a finer figure to console you when Carlos and I have hidden you good-by."

What happened then happened quickly. The most richly dressed of the three gentlemen sprang from his mount, swept off his hat and bowed before Camila.

"Señorita," he said, "my friend Don Andres is right. I am Gaspar de Morella, a marquis of Spain and of Mexico, and I am in need of a wife. I have been made Governor of Florida and I am riding to Vera Cruz to set sail. I know nothing about you except that you are beautiful and you know nothing about me except what I have told you. If that is enough for me, señorita, why shouldn't it be enough for you? Come with me now to Vera Cruz and we can be married there before the ship sails; and in Florida you shall be the Governor's lady and I shall be only one of your slaves."

Camila Flon stared at the thick-shouldered young nobleman before her, then turned and looked at Felipe Rubio, where he stood with his mouth agape, leaning on his broom—the broom with which he had struck her a few minutes before.

Suddenly she laughed. He had asked her whether she expected to catch a grandee of the Viceroy's court, and here was the grandee in the flesh. The thing was so strange that it must be fate—and it had come in the very nick of time, when Rubio's blow made it impossible to stand his tyranny a day longer. She turned impulsively to Don Gaspar.

"I will go with you, señor," she said, and instantly he seized her hand and raised it to his lips. "Bring up a horse," he shouted, and a hostler came from the rear of the column leading a roan mare.

"You can ride, lovely one?" Don Gaspar asked. "Good! And you are ready now? We can buy what you need in Vera Cruz: satins fit for a marquis' lady, and jewels for those slim fingers." He lifted her to the saddle, remounted his own horse and waved his hand. So, without a word to Felipe Rubio or a glance behind her at the Casa de Toros, where Captain O'Reilly stood glaring helplessly through the window, Camila Flon rode away by the side of Gaspar de Morella to be a Marquis' lady. . . .

She was lying some fifteen hours later on a velvet-covered couch in a richly furnished room under the high poop deck of the forty-gun ship, *Santa Felipa*. Three of Gaspar's men had brought her there and had left her, barring the door on the outside. It was night and the ship was at sea. She wondered how long it would be before Gaspar would come.

He had bought for her in Vera Cruz the finery he had promised; she was dressed now in rich lavender satin with brooches and pendants of amethyst. But when she had reminded him that they were to be married before the ship sailed, he had told her that time was lacking and the formalities would have to wait until they reached Florida. She had expected this, of course, and at the inn, with the ache and shame of Rubio's broom across her shoulders and all hope dead in her, she had been desperate enough to accept the prospect calmly. But now, with the moment near at hand, she was afraid.

Her thoughts shuttled back and forth between what must soon happen and a strange thing that had already happened. Going down the ladder at the Vera Cruz wharf to enter the small boat which would take Gaspar and herself out to the *Santa Felipa*, she had nearly fallen, and a seaman standing in the boat had caught her in his arms. In the instant while he held her thus he had whispered hurriedly to her, "*Food and drink are very dear.*"

That was the countersign of the Revolutionists and she had thought for one incredulous moment that the man must be Mateo. But the brief glimpse she had had of him before he turned quickly away showed that he wasn't Mateo. Yet his face, half hidden under his pulled-down cap, had seemed somehow familiar.

Who could he have been? And why had he given the countersign? She hadn't seen or heard of Mateo for weeks. Evidently he had been arrested by the authorities and imprisoned or killed. When he had told her good-

by he had said that he was going inland on a dangerous mission for the Revolution. Mateo had told her that if anyone came to the inn and whispered to her "*Food and drink are very dear*," she must help him, for anyone giving that countersign would be a Revolutionist. But no such person had ever come to the Casa de Toros.

But a man *had* come at last who had said something like that. The man who had danced the flamenco with her—the tall, dark, blue-eyed man in crimson who had called her Flower of the Flame and whom a drunken Portuguese officer had denounced fantastically as Pancho O'Reilly, the famous pirate. He had whispered to her "Danger is my meat and drink." It wasn't the countersign exactly but it was strangely near to it.

A thought flashed into her mind: Had that man been testing her, trying her to see if she could be trusted?

SUDDENLY she jumped to her feet. All at once it had come to her—the seaman who had whispered the countersign while helping her down the ladder at the wharf was the man who had danced the flamenco with her, the man who had said, "Danger is my meat and drink." That was why his face had seemed familiar. But what did it all mean? Why had he been dressed then like a Mexican gentleman and now like an ordinary seaman? Why had he—

She turned abruptly with a quick intake of her breath. The bar of the door was being drawn. This would be Gaspar—and now she had a horror of Gaspar. At the inner end of the cabin there was a smaller room shut off with curtains. She backed toward these curtains but before she gained their shelter the door of the outer cabin was flung open and in the entrance stood Don Gaspar.

"Ah, señorita," he cried thickly, "you are more ravishing than ever. Amethysts become you and lavender is your color. You are, I swear it, the peri at the gate of Paradise."

He moved toward her and she backed away. He laughed horribly and pursued her, supporting himself against the large table in the middle of the room. Almost at once he had her penned in a corner whence there was no escape. At his left the curtains across the entrance to the inner room parted and a man flung himself upon Gaspar, hurling him to the floor; too amazed to move, Camila Flon saw this man choke Gaspar into limp unconsciousness.

He loosed his grip finally and rose. Not until then was she sure of him; in his battered sea-togs he was very different from the crimson-clad stranger who had called her Flower of the Flame and whom the Portuguese had identified as Pancho O'Reilly.



Illustrated by Raymond Sisley

"What is your secret, Flower of the Flame?" he asked. . . . "I saw the trouble under your smile. . . . Is it love or is it danger?"

Incredulously she whispered that name, and he nodded. "It was easy," he told her hurriedly, answering the question in her eyes. "The ship's short-handed, and they had a press-gang out catching seamen in Vera Cruz. I let them catch me while you were doing your shopping. I gave you the countersign at the wharf to cheer you up."

"But how—" she began. He interrupted her: "I got in here from the poop deck through one of the stern windows—just in time," he told her

HE moved to the open door and stood just within the threshold, listening. No sound came from the passageway outside. O'Reilly slipped the sliding bar from the outside of the door, fitted it into an inside bracket, closed the door and bolted it. He ran to Gaspar's prostrate form, loosed the belt that held his sword and dagger and buckled it around his own waist.

"So far so good, Flame Flower," he said to Camila. "With luck we may last until help comes."

"Why have you done this?" she asked breathlessly. "Why do you risk your life?"

"I thought you were a Spanish spy," he told her. "I had to atone for that insult. Perhaps there's another reason. Your mirror might—"

He broke off, his hand raised in warning. Footsteps were hurrying along the passageway. A loud knock sounded on the door.

"Excellency," a hoarse voice shouted. "You are wanted on deck, Don Gaspar. A strange ship, showing no lights."

There was a noise of running feet in the passageway outside. Captain O'Reilly's hand closed on Camila's wrist. "It is my schooner," he whispered. "I sent my men word by Mateo to attack as soon as the *Santa Felipa* cleared the harbor. The *Falcon* will run in and board. If we can stay here until my men—"

Outside, more feet came pounding along the passage. Again a cutlass hilt hammered on the door. "Don Gaspar! Excellency!" another voice cried: "A hostile schooner is about to run us aboard."

A brief silence followed, then a deep-throated oath. "He's in the inner room with the girl. He can't hear us. Break down the door."

The door shook under a rain of blows. O'Reilly pushed Camila Flon into the corner behind him. He pulled the long table from the center of the room and turned it on its side so that it formed a barricade, and, Gaspar's sword in his right hand, the dagger in his left, he waited. With a crash of shattered timber the door fell in.

There was an instant of silence. The Spanish soldiers and seamen crowding into the room saw Gaspar's senseless



form on the floor; from it their eyes lifted to the pair standing behind the improvised barricade. A tall red-jacketed officer whipped out his sword. "What's this?" he cried.

Captain O'Reilly saluted. This was one of those majestic moments that he loved and he knew that even in Mateo's sea-clothes he was a fine sight standing there with Camila Flon behind him and his sword at the salute. But to his annoyance he could think of nothing memorable to say. Yet there was clearly need to say something.

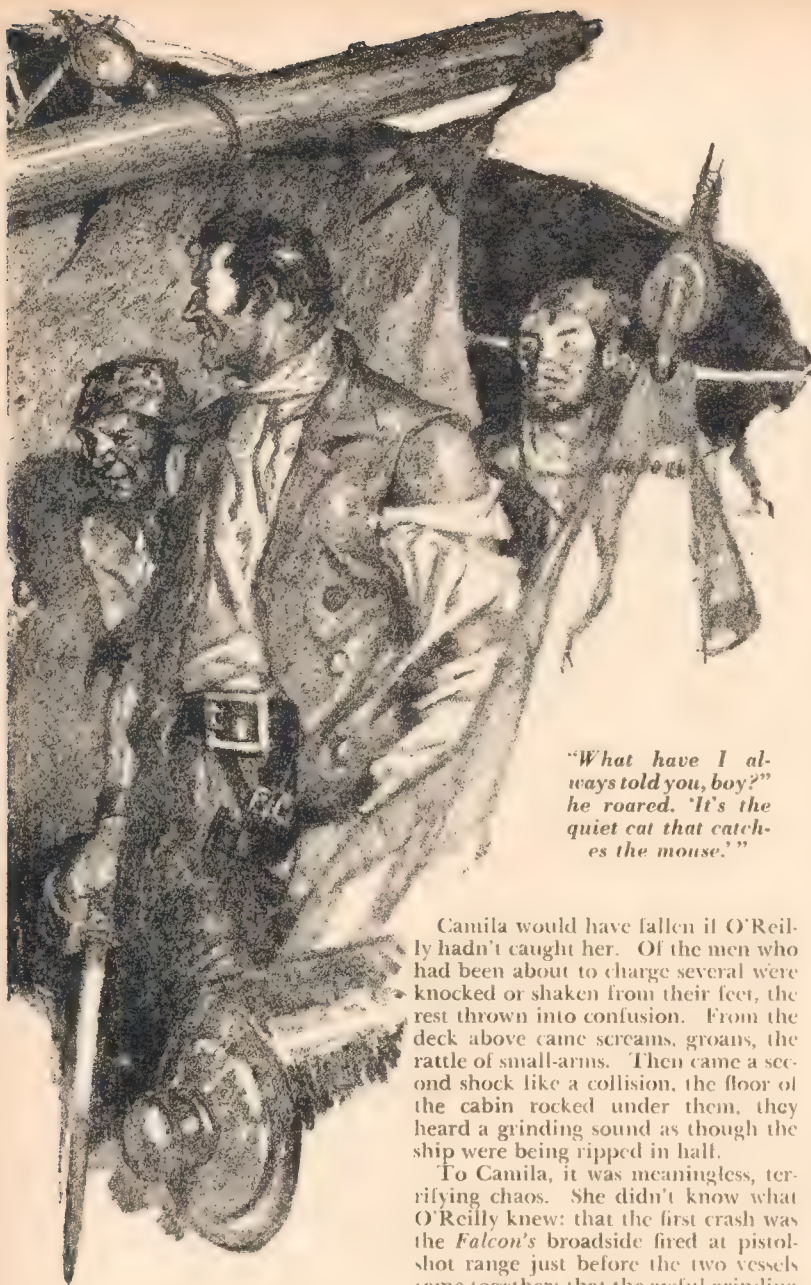
"Why, Señor Lieutenant," he replied, "this is what you see with your eyes—a whipped dog on the floor and a damned ugly dog at that. Do you wish to join him there, Señor Lieutenant?"

It was hardly a speech worthy of the occasion but there was no time for further speech. The red-jacketed officer leaped forward; his sword flashed across the table in a venomous thrust. O'Reilly parried it, feinted, lunged. The Spaniard writhed downward, a

thin red stream trickling from his throat.

It was a remarkable thrust, brilliant, powerful, impressive in its finality. It told them at once that O'Reilly was a swordsman. There was a moment's pause. Then they thronged in, lunging and hacking across the table.

That barrier stopped their charge, gave him room for foot-play. A cat-footed seaman sprang upon the barricade but fell back, pierced through the thigh. Another man gave a sharp surprised cry and clapped his hand to his chest where a red stain widened. O'Reilly, aware of Camila Flon's eyes upon him, pictured himself in his splendor and was happy. He lived wholly for this splendid present—the dubious future mattered nothing. He fought spectacularly, theatrically, yet with coolness, with an audacity which overlooked no opportunity, a flashing speed which for a time overcame the odds against him.



"What have I always told you, boy?" he roared. "It's the quiet cat that catches the mouse."

Camila would have fallen if O'Reilly hadn't caught her. Of the men who had been about to charge several were knocked or shaken from their feet, the rest thrown into confusion. From the deck above came screams, groans, the rattle of small-arms. Then came a second shock like a collision, the floor of the cabin rocked under them, they heard a grinding sound as though the ship were being ripped in half.

To Camila, it was meaningless, terrifying chaos. She didn't know what O'Reilly knew: that the first crash was the *Falcon's* broadside fired at pistol-shot range just before the two vessels came together; that the awful grinding sound meant that O'Reilly's schooner was ranging alongside and his men were swarming aboard the Spaniard. She knew only that suddenly there was yet another crash, that part of the cabin wall in front of her flew into fragments as a cannon ball smashed through it, that a section of wooden ceiling, its support destroyed, fell squarely upon the mass of their enemies.

Her mind retained no clear record of what followed, only a series of detached and separate images.

O'Reilly was dragging her by the arm across the smashed and ruined cabin in the debris of which men were

struggling to rise. Then she was running with him along a dim passage with a mob of enemies pursuing them. She saw other enemies in front and gave up hope. But O'Reilly turned aside and a moment later he was dragging her up a steep ladderlike stair.

They emerged on the open deck. There, in the red glare of leaping flames, many men were fighting—Spaniards and wild-eyed bare-chested men with scarves on their heads and gold hoops in their ears, men who cheered madly at sight of Captain O'Reilly.

He left her beside the mainmast and leaped to join them. His jacket half torn from him, his great bronzed arms bare to the shoulders, his hawk-face streaked and smeared with smoke, he was a magnificent figure of a man. He knew it and gloried in it. In the cabin he had been a cornered panther; now he was a victorious lion driving his foes before him. His eyes were on Camila as he fought and he fought exultantly, knowing that she was worshipping him, that she was longing for the time when he would take her in his arms. For himself, he could hardly wait for that moment.

His eyes were on her at the instant when she caught sight of Mateo—Mateo, a bloody rag around his head, a bloody cutlass in his hand, who was fighting his way aft.

Camila, her hand at her throat, stood watching him breathlessly. She never took her eyes from him, it seemed, and never looked at O'Reilly again. Once, when Mateo slipped in a pool of blood and nearly fell under the swords, Camila screamed.

Captain O'Reilly's blue eyes blinked rapidly, his cheeks paled momentarily, but he was still a fine figure of a man as he led the last victorious rush which made him master of the *Santa Felipa*. In the cabin Gaspar was dead or alive, it didn't matter which, for Gaspar's gold was taken, and now in a little while the Revolution would blaze, Mexico would be free. But as Captain O'Reilly strode aft to where Camila Flon stood beside the mainmast with Mateo's arm around her, he wasn't thinking about the Revolution.

HE was thinking of how the world was full of women and he, of course, could have his pick of them, but a colorless, quiet fellow like Mateo was damned lucky if he found one who would look at him. This girl was too thin, now that he had time to scrutinize her closely, but she'd do well enough for Mateo, who couldn't afford to be particular.

He put his great arms around the pair, drawing their faces together till they kissed. Then, drawing back, he regarded them with a smile.

"Eh, Mateo!" he roared. "What have I always told you, boy? 'It's the quiet cat that catches the mouse.'"

They drew off presently, leaving another soldier motionless on the floor beside Gaspar and the red-jacketed officer.

Through the doorway more men came crowding, soldiers armed with straight swords, sailors with cutlasses. They closed in slowly, forcing O'Reilly back. They pulled the table out of the way and crouched for a charge which must overwhelm him.

On the floor Don Gaspar stirred, sat up slowly; and next moment, sudden as a summer thunderclap, came a deafening crash and the ship shook as though she had run upon a rock.

*An off-the-beaten track story of Wyoming by
the man who gave us "Bells Up the Abo"*

by *RAY NAFZIGER*



Illustrated by
John Fulton

SURE SLOW FERRY

WITHIN the log ranch-house Lecky pressed her nose against the frigid kitchen window and looked disconsolately at the muddy river and the bleak bluffs beyond. She hated Wyoming. She had hated it since she had come to Papa's ranch three days before, and unflattening her nose now, she said so.

"It's en-vir-on-ment," asserted her brother, Xerxes, who liked big words. "En-vir-on-ment is what is around you. If your environment is difficult and disagreeable, but you rise above it, it makes you strong. The more you hate your environment, the stronger it makes you."

Lecky unflattened her nose again. "If what you hate makes you strong, you could drink castor oil all day."

The ranch cook, Mrs. Tom Forge, inspecting a pan of biscuits in the oven, straightened her barrel-like person and laughed loudly. Mrs. Forge was a jolly woman. Yesterday she had allowed Lecky to bake a pan of small biscuits and a miniature apple pie. Mr. Tom Forge was jolly too, and so was Papa, but no amount of jollity could offset this empty Wyoming valley and the raw winds that nipped fingers and ears even in June. Worst of all was the loneliness. Instead of the shops and crowds and clanging street-cars of the city where Aunt Ethel lived, there was

only an occasional horseman or lumber wagon coming to cross the deep, swift river on Papa's ferry.

The door opened, letting in a chill draft and Papa and Mr. Tom Forge in for dinner. Papa was dressed in a blue wool shirt, goat-hair chaps and high-heeled boots armed with spurs that jingled as he walked across the kitchen, to swing Lecky up almost to the board ceiling.

"Shivering before a little cool air?" asked Papa. "You and Xerxes must get outdoors more. Wyoming cold is good for you. It makes big cattle, big horses, husky people. Xerxes will grow as big as Charley Thompson—and Lecky'll outweigh Mrs. Forge."



"They're taking those rustlers to the Judge-and-Jury Pine to hang them," Xerxes said. . . . Lecky began to shiver.

"Lord forbid!" cried Mrs. Forge, clattering the dinner down on the oil-cloth of the kitchen table.

"Yes, cold will make your bodies big," went on Papa, "but it won't make your brains grow. We'll have that done for you in school."

Lecky was surprised. "Do they have school in Wyoming?"

"The dandiest in the land," said Papa as he deposited her on a raw-hide-bottomed chair at the table. "Winter and summer both. The summer term starts next week. In a log schoolhouse over the ridge."

"School in summer?" asked Xerxes, astonished.

Papa stopped splashing in the basin to reach for a towel. "Did I forget



to tell you that in Wyoming we have summer school, because there are so many days in winter when children can't risk riding through the cold and snow? Lanruth and I hired a teacher only last week—a young man—just to teach you two and the Lanruth children."

School in Wyoming, thought Lecky, chewing steak slowly, could be nothing like school at Aunt Ethel's. There you walked three blocks to a huge brick building and entered a room cheerful with glossy desks, soft curtains and geraniums in window-boxes. After trading a smiling good-morning with Miss Fortescue, you began your duties as blackboard monitor.

Surreptitiously she wiped away a tear, spread open a biscuit on her plate as Papa had instructed and spooned brown, thick gravy over the halves. Besides steak and gravy and biscuits, there were bowls of brown beans and fried potatoes, canned tomatoes, canned peas and an apple pie nearly as large as Papa's ferry.

FINISHING before the others, as he always did, Papa rolled a cigarette and looked thoughtfully at Lecky, chubby and small, and at Xerxes, tall and spindling.

"You two must not become discouraged," he told them. "Usually at first people don't like Wyoming; it seems harsh and rough. Wyoming scares you a little, eh, Xerxes?"

"No, sir, it does not scare me," returned Xerxes, but not very promptly.

"It scares me," thought Lecky. "It has too much en-vir-on-ment."

"I want you both to be happy here," went on Papa. "Since I can't be a rancher and live in a city with you, you must live here with me. A father cannot leave his motherless children to other people to raise. He needs them close to him, just as they need him. So we will be pioneers here together and as pioneers we can expect a few hardships. But not for long. Some day where we now have a ranch and a ferry, miles from neighbors, there will be a town."

"Here?" exclaimed Xerxes. "But where are the people?"

"They will come," Papa said confidently. "Settling first along the river and then back from it until they fill the country. Like a stone thrown into a pond with the circles spreading wider and wider."

"Concentrically," put in Xerxes. Lecky echoed the word in an admiring whisper. Xerxes had lost two years of school through illness, but since he had spent the time in incessant reading, his illness had advanced rather than hampered his education.

"But why," went on Papa, "you will ask, why should this particular spot become a townsite?" With a stub pencil he drew on the oilcloth a crooked line for the river, "V's" for mountain ranges. "Always in a country you find a center, at easy fords or places maybe where old buffalo- and Indian-trails crossed. Our ranch is one of those natural centers, and here more and more settler wagons will roll, to use the ferry in flood times, to ford the river in summer and fall. And of those people, some will stay."

"But before settlers will stay in a country, it must be civilized," argued Xerxes. "And this country isn't. Here they hang men without giving

them a court trial. Mr. Forge says half a dozen rustlers have been hanged from that Judge-and-Jury Pine on Charley Thompson's ranch."

"That was bad," admitted Papa gravely. "But that is past. It will not happen again. Charley Thompson and the others cannot be allowed to hang even cattle thieves; it is murder. And remember my words; soon there will be stores here, a blacksmith shop, houses. And finally a railroad and a bridge, and our town, 'Bishop's Ferry.' In it we will have Electra Square named after Lecky. And Xerxes Avenue, and Forge Street."

Lecky sighed. Now there was only environment.

"It will be warmer this afternoon," said Papa. "You two bundle up and ride over to visit the Lanruths to tell them school begins Monday. I'll show you the road."

AT the stable Papa put Lecky's saddle with its pleasant smell of new leather on the rough-coated brown pony, while Tom Forge saddled Xerxes' slim-legged blue roan.

Lecky had named her pony Tip because the end of his left ear was missing. "He bit it off one day himself," Papa had stated gravely, "in a fit of coltish anger."

Tip had gentle eyes but Xerxes' roan had a calculating pair which he was fond of rolling about to make himself look vicious.

"He looks like a Moorish barb," Xerxes had said on first viewing his horse. "He should have a Spanish name."

Alhambra, Xerxes called the blue roan, but it developed that Alhambra didn't care a hoot how many big words Xerxes knew. When Alhambra looked around at Xerxes he saw only a para-

sitic biped sitting, for no logical reason, on his back. Xerxes and Alhambra, Papa noticed, did not get along very well.

"A horse and a good rider make a unit—one," said Papa, turning to go back after he had set them on the right trail. "They should move as one." He held up two fingers pressed together.

LECKY approved the log house they found at the end of the rutted road. It shone with cleanliness. And Lecky envied the big Lanruth family; the children ranged from Conrad, doing a man's work, down to a baby in a homemade willow cradle. Next to Conrad was Tina, wearing her light golden hair in thick plaits. Tina was chief helper to her mother in scrubbing, washing, ironing, canning, dairying, gardening, and found leisure besides to play the parlor organ.

"Your brother and I will be in the same spelling class," Tina remarked to Lecky. "Last term in town school I had sixty-seven headmarks," she threw in as a quiet challenge.

"Xerxes can spell any word," boasted Lecky. "But spelling is very hard for me," she added, disliking to admit a fault before this capable creature.

"I will help you," Tina offered. "We must all help one another in Wyoming."

A friendly, bright family, the Lanruths, all except Otto, who was next in age to Tina. Lecky did not understand Otto. He wore a fixed, foolish smile, and after he had been told to do a task, the directions had to be patiently repeated over and over for him. He was big for his twelve years, and much stronger than Xerxes, who was fourteen. But Otto was only in the second grade and his legs and arms did not move as "one."

"What is wrong with Otto?" Lecky asked Xerxes when the two were returning home. "Is he sick?"

"No, not sick," said Xerxes. "There is a lack. I will try to explain it. Everything in the world has life—"

"Everything?" interrupted Lecky. "Not those rocks." She pointed.

"Yes, even rocks. They're filled with billions of little molecules whirling around like mad. Now let us suppose that everything gives off a light as strong as the life in it—what it knows and feels. Those rocks aren't much alive, so they'd give off just a faint glow. Like phosphorous wood."

Lecky chuckled. It was a nice game—to pretend that all things, even rocks, gave off a light.

"A tree," went on Xerxes, "being more alive than a stone, would give a stronger glow. And animals—like horses and cattle—a much stronger light, but very dull beside people. People are a lot more alive than animals—they know and feel a lot more."

Lecky looked at Xerxes, stiff in his saddle instead of relaxed and easy like Papa and Tom Forge. A bright light would come from Xerxes because he knew so much. Papa would be like a bearded arc lamp with a flavor of tobacco.

Alhambra jumped and Xerxes jerked on the reins hard. "Quit it!" he ordered hoarsely. "You needn't think I'm afraid of you."

Alhambra flicked his tail in what might have been a contemptuous gesture. A man maybe burned with a lot more candle-power than a horse, appeared to be what the pony was thinking, but a lot of horses had dimmed men's superior lights by piling them on the ground.

"As to Otto," said Xerxes after Alhambra had quieted, "his glow would be very dull. And it will never be much brighter."

The afternoon had turned gloomy, with a rain hanging over the mountains and a sweep of cold air down the valley. At the river Papa and Tom Forge were going out in the ferry to remove floating driftwood which had fouled the thick rope cable in mid-stream. Papa's ferry was an awkward affair—two long, flat-bottomed boats curiously placed at right angles to the cable and connected by a plank platform or bridge large enough to hold a wagon and four-horse team. A crank attached to a windlass-like affair pulled the lumbering craft along the cable. The ferry traveled very slowly, but it was sure—a quality emphasized in the price schedule painted on a wide board nailed to a cottonwood tree.

"Bishop's Ferry" was on the first line and on the second, "Slow But Sure." Patrons with a witty turn of mind, which included practically everyone in Wyoming, told Papa it should be "Sure Slow Ferry."

Xerxes went out in the ferry with Papa and Tom Forge. While Lecky watched from the bank, two youngish fellows rode up and waited, to cross. One, a knobby-featured scantling of a cowboy, had stopped to visit with Tom Forge at the corrals two days before. Mrs. Tom Forge had told Lecky that he was Bill Clond; his brother had been one of the rustlers hanged from Charley Thompson's Judge-and-Jury Pine.

Clond's companion was a redhead with big blotchy freckles. When this man's horse dragged his grounded bridle reins toward some spears of new grass, the redhead swore and batted the animal over the eye with his gloved hand. Lecky trembled and turned away to watch the returning ferry. Xerxes was proudly turning the crank that moved the craft.

"That redhead fellow is your teacher, Mr. Edgens," Papa told Lecky after the two horsemen had been set

on the other bank. "And I don't like to see him chumming around with one of the Clonds," he added for the benefit of Tom Forge.

"I'll make you a bet," offered Tom Forge. "That no teacher, livin' or dead, can teach Bill Clond anything new about stealin' cattle. But smart as he is, Bill will fool around once too often with Charley Thompson's cows and find hisself dancing on nothin' under that Judge-and-Jury Pine same as his brother done."

"There'll never be another Judge-and-Jury Pine hanging," Papa insisted stubbornly. "It's nothing but murder!"

Monday morning, Xerxes and Lecky rode to school, carrying a gallon pail heavy with Mrs. Tom Forge's idea of a midday snack. They reached the little log building set in a brushy creek bottom just as the four Lanruth children arrived in an old carriage drawn by a team of big-footed plow-horses. Tina drove, with Otto sitting beside her. Clara and little Carl were in the back seat. Otto, wearing his simple smile, began to unhitch the team, beginning at the neck-yoke. Patiently Tina told him to drop the tugs first.

The Lanruths had brought a huge basket of food and in addition buckets, a broom, a mop and a long bar of yellow soap. The schoolhouse which had not been used since the previous summer would need a good cleaning, explained Tina.

THE six waited outside the locked door until past nine o'clock when the red-headed teacher, Edgens, raced over the ridge on a gray colt in whose mouth the bits had churned a bloody froth. The colt shied at the children and as punishment got a savage quirt. Dismounting, the redhead scowlingly clumped past the children and unlocked the door.

Lecky compared his unshaved bristles and soiled shirt with Miss Fortescue and her starched, snow-white waists. Trailing after the others, she stopped just beyond the doorway, her eyes filling with hot tears. This dismal room could not be a school; the windows had no flower-boxes or soft curtains; there were no ebony-surfaced blackboards with Miss Fortescue's pretty writing in warm blue and red crayons. The floor bore the dried trackings of muddy boots and in a corner were two small stacks of dirty, tattered books.

Tina and the rest had halted at the teacher's desk.

"Take your seats," snapped Mr. Edgens, slipping the loop of the quirt from his wrist and throwing the whip into a corner. "What you waiting for?"

"First we always clean the floor and windows," Tina informed him. "Otto

will mop the floor, and Clara and I will wash the windows and desks."

"What for?" asked Mr. Edgens gruffly. "It's only a school. Set down and let's get it over."

They took seats, Lecky shrinking down miserably behind a desk carved with a crude outline of a Texas long-horn adorned with a dozen brands. This could not be school!

Mr. Edgens looked at Tina's pale golden braids and smiled suddenly. "What is your name, Bright-eyes?" he asked. "And how old are you?"

"My name is Christina Lanruth," she said primly. "I am thirteen and I am in the sixth grade."

"Thirteen," grunted the teacher and wrote, using the other hand to scratch under his cowhide vest. He looked next at lumpy Otto, sprawled with his feet in the aisle, his vacant blue eyes staring at the mountains.

"Hey, you!" he snapped. "Wake up. What's your name?"

Otto grinned amiably at the teacher. Recalling Xerxes' fantasy, Lecky thought that Otto gave off a weak but soft light, while Mr. Edgens was an angry reddish glare.

"Wipe off that jackass grin!" he snapped. "What's your name?"

"Otto," said the boy, nervously widening his grin.

MR. EDGENS got slowly to his feet and advanced on Otto. "Smart, are you?" he said. "I like to see boys try and act smart with me. Boys and horses both."

Tina stood up. "Mister, please," she said, "this is my brother Otto. He is in the second grade only."

"And too big to be in the second grade only," the teacher mimicked her. "Watch me make him lope into the third grade. Look at me, you!" he thundered at the boy.

Otto, quivering now with fright, looked at the floor instead.

"Mister," said Tina again, "Otto is not right in the head. He has never been right since he was a baby."

Deliberately the teacher cracked a hand hard against the boy's cheek. Otto jumped convulsively, and scarlet spread over the side of his face. He looked up at Tina with a doglike appeal.

"Please let me explain to you, Mister," cried Tina; but Edgens grabbed up his quirt from the corner where he had thrown it.

"I know how to treat balky boys and balky horses," he declared. "I whip the balkiness out of them."

"Otto is not responsible for what he does, sir," interposed Xerxes. "He is not right mentally."

"No, he is not right," agreed Mr. Edgens grimly, stooping for his quirt. "He is wrong. Very wrong." The quirt slashed down. A whimpering cry came from Otto.



"Look!" chortled Mr. Edgens. "He makes a noise. He's not dumb." His arm lifted again, but before it descended, Tina had caught the quirt lash in her hands.

"Oh, don't, Mister!" she pleaded. "Please, Mister, listen: Otto is not right in the head. He is only our poor Otto."

"He's my Otto now, Bright-eyes," returned the teacher in a voice that had become almost pleasant. He shoved Tina aside and took a firmer grip on Otto's collar. The girl clutched his arm, and Clara and Carl came in to help.

Lecky turned to her brother. "Xerxes!" she cried. Xerxes would surely know how to stop this horrible thing.

Xerxes rushed toward the struggling group, arriving just in time to collide with the teacher's elbow. Hit in the throat, he staggered back.

Meanwhile Tina and little Clara were clinging to the teacher's arm, with tiny Carl tugging earnestly at a boot. Kicked away, Carl crawled back determinedly. Tina and Clara were slammed hard against the teacher's desk.

"Get to your seats!" raged Mr. Edgens. "Or I'll wear out this quirt on all of you. Take your seats!"

Xerxes, white-faced, holding his hands to his throat, started to obey, but the Lanruths broke on the teacher in another determined wave.

Lecky went with them, to grab for the man's forearm. She was afraid of him, but not as much as she was of the horrible sound of the quirt.

Otto showed one brief, brilliant flash then: he bit the teacher's hand. Freed, he fled to the door and through it to throw himself into the thick brush along the creek. Starting to follow, the teacher tripped over Carl, now doggedly entwined about a booted calf, and crashed full length on the floor.

Cursing, the man got up to strike blindly with the quirt. The lash struck Clara's shoulder. She cried out sharply.

"Don't you dare hit her again!" ordered Tina, putting Clara behind her. "If you do, my father will shoot you. You might have put out her eyes."

The teacher stood, legs far apart, breathing hard, glaring at Tina. Men-



"I know how to treat balky boys and balky horses," he declared.

acingly he drew back the quirt, but the girl did not give an inch.

He dropped his arm. "Get out, the whole lot of you!" he bellowed.

And then before they could move, he snatched his hat from the desk and rushed through the doorway. The hammer of the gray colt's hoofs came, beating back over the ridge.

The three Lanruths went outside to coax Otto from hiding. Xerxes sat down at a desk and pillowed his head on his arms. When Lecky went over to touch his shoulder, he got up slowly and they went outdoors, Lecky closing the door. The Lanruths had already hitched the team to the carriage. Tina turned to Xerxes and Lecky.

"You were brave to help us," she said. "We will never forget what you did for poor Otto."

The carriage rolled away, and mounting Alhambra and Tip, Xerxes and Lecky started home.

"He was drunk," muttered Xerxes. "He was dangerous. He struck me in the throat so hard I couldn't fight any more. I wanted to fight him but I wasn't able."

"Of course, Xerxes," Lecky agreed. "You were brave. He wouldn't have dared hurt girls, but he might have killed you."

At the river they found Papa hammering on one of the aprons which doubled as gangplank and guard for the ferry bridge.

"Home in the middle of the morning?" he asked.

Xerxes dismounted slowly. "The filthy brute of a teacher started to whip Otto with his quirt. We tried to

tell him about Otto, but he wouldn't listen. Tina fought him like a tiger and so did Lecky and Clara and little Carl, until Otto broke loose and ran outdoors."

Papa put down his hammer. "So you all fought to save Otto from a whipping? Even Lecky? That was right. You must never be afraid to speak and fight for the weak and helpless. I am proud of you."

Xerxes' lips began to tremble and then the tears began flowing down his thin face. "But we didn't all fight. I started to but I was hit in the throat and then I was afraid to fight any more. I was a coward. I was afraid of him. I'm afraid of Alhambra, too."

Papa put his arm about Xerxes' shoulders. "Courage, son, is something that must be practised. But no one could expect you to fight a grown man. I'll ride over to see Henry Lanruth; we'll get rid of this teacher in a hurry."

Papa had not returned by Lecky's bedtime, but he was at breakfast the next morning.

"We couldn't find your teacher," he told them. "The Clonds say he's left the country. I found out he was a relative of that thieving family. I'm leaving this morning to hire another teacher, an Eastern girl vacationing at a ranch across the mountains."

Xerxes kept his eyes on his steak and fried potatoes and said nothing. Lecky too was still, but, "I do not want to go to school here in Wyoming," she was thinking. "I would rather stay home and help Mrs. Forge. The floors and windows are dirty. The books smell, and there are no geraniums and no curtains. And the desks are all cut up."

Papa drove away in the buckboard after telling Xerxes to help Tom Forge with the chores. Lecky, with a little assistance from Mrs. Forge, baked a cake for poor Otto. One side was a little sunk but the other half looked fine. She asked Xerxes to ride with her to deliver it, but he shook his head and again the tears came.

"I'm ashamed to see the Lanruths," he sobbed. "I was afraid to fight for Otto, and the rest of you weren't."

"But Papa said that you couldn't be expected to fight a grown man," Lecky told him. Xerxes would not be comforted, however, and Mrs. Forge rode with Lecky instead.

When they came home, they found the kitchen reeking with liniment and Tom Forge soaking his left leg in a tub of hot water. He had been kicked by a horse and Xerxes had helped him to the house and was now doing the chores. More, when a big wagon piled high with household goods and a plow and a coop of chickens rumbled up, Xerxes ferried the wagon and the family across the river, while Lecky watched anxiously from the bank.

Before Xerxes returned, two more patrons arrived, neighboring ranchers. The giant with the dangling yellow ropes of mustache was Charley Thompson, on whose ranch grew the notorious Judge-and-Jury Pine. The small frosty-bearded man was Jim Elder. Both had rifles in saddle scabbards and six-shooters in belt holsters. Oldish Jim Elder was scowling and silent, but while he waited for the ferry, Charley Thompson talked genially, asking Lecky all about her pony and the Forges and Papa and the new town that Papa was planning.

Xerxes brought the ferry to the bank. Charley Thompson let down the apron and Jim Elder led their horses up on the bridge. Xerxes started back across the river.

"You know where they're going?" he said to Lecky when he returned. "They're hunting thieves that stole a bunch of their cattle."

THE next day Tom Forge was still unable to walk and again Xerxes did the chores. Rain sluiced down all morning and in the afternoon the sky over the spongy earth was clouded. Mr. and Mrs. Tom Forge played seven-up in the kitchen. Outdoors it was cold but not too cold for Lecky to ride Tip back and forth between the ranch house, the corrals and the ferry.

Toward evening Xerxes had more patrons for the ferry—four riders on the other bank. They were Charley Thompson and Jim Elder with two men whose hands were tied to their saddle-horns—Teacher Edgens and Bill Clond.

Xerxes and Lecky stared across the river until in answer to Elder's impatient hails, Xerxes slowly untied the rope that tethered the ferry to a cottonwood stump.

"They caught up with those rustlers—and they were the teacher and Bill Clond," he said. "And they're not taking them to the sheriff or they wouldn't be crossing the river. They're taking them to the Judge-and-Jury Pine. To hang them. To kill them."

Lecky began to shiver, just as she had at the whipping of Otto.

"Not going across for them wouldn't do any good," went on Xerxes.

"Lecky, when we come back, after the apron is let down, make it look like Tip is running away with you. And scream for help—as loud as you can. Try to get Charley Thompson and Jim Elder to ride after you. Will you do that, Lecky?"

"Yes," she promised, although she didn't understand it.

When the four horses had been loaded on the ferry, with the two prisoners left tied to their saddles for the crossing, Lecky leaned forward to pat Tip's neck. The brown pony was so gentle a soul that she doubted he could be made even to look as if he were running away. A burr with hard, sharp pines was stuck in the pony's tail. Standing in the stirrups, she slipped it under the saddle-blanket, continuing to stand so the burr did not press into Tip's back.

As the lumbering craft touched the muddy bank, Xerxes let down the apron. He nodded at Lecky then and she sat down hard on the burr. Tip jumped and broke into a wild gallop.

"Help! Help!" called Lecky, while Xerxes set up an excited yelling.

Charley Thompson hastily led his big bay off the ferry and mounted to race after the pony. Slyly Lecky, still screaming for help, turned Tip to head him toward the river bank. Urged by Xerxes, Jim Elder went into action. Leaving the prisoners still sitting their horses on the ferry, he spurred between the runaway and the stream.

Charley Thompson came in to catch a rein and halt Tip. After lifting Lecky to the ground, he investigated, finding the burr under the blanket almost immediately.

Then both men swung, startled. The ferry was moving back across the stream. The prisoners were out of sight—undoubtedly lying in one of the flat boats. Jim Elder growled and dismounted to yank his rifle from its scabbard.

"Turn back here or I'll shoot!" he shouted hoarsely. "Turn back."

"I won't," called Xerxes in his thin but firm voice. "Go ahead and shoot." It reminded Lecky exactly of the story told by Miss Fortescue about Barbara Frietchie.

"We aint tellin' you again, younker!" Elder called ominously. "Bring back them men or I start shootin'!"

"I won't," again returned Xerxes from the ferry. "You've got no right to lynch anybody. It's murder."

Jim Elder leveled his rifle. Lecky flung herself against him. "Don't you dare shoot!" she screamed, and yanked fiercely at the sleeve of his jacket.

Jim Elder and Charley Thompson looked down at her in astonishment. "A reg'lar wild cat," observed Charley Thompson, and then, "What's all this?" he bellowed. "You know what, Jim? This little 'un tricked us. Made her pony run away so we'd chase her while her brother cut the two loose."

Charley Thompson let out a guffaw. "No use, Jim, of waggin' that rifle around. You can't bluff that boy of Bishop's. The joke's on us; these two kids jist naturally up an' taken them coyotes away from us."

HE lifted Lecky into her saddle and holding her there for an instant, looked at her. "Always did like spunky little girls and their brothers, too," he rumbled. "If they don't want no hangings in here, Jim, we'll jist naturally have to reserve our ropes for cows' necks." He turned.

"You, Bill Clond!" he bawled. "And you, Edgens! Both hit your saddles and head on out o' the country—and stay out! If we ever run 'cross you again, we won't bother with no ropes."

After that, Thompson climbed into his saddle and chuckling to himself, rode away. Jim Elder trailed him.

Lecky waited until Xerxes, returning from setting the men and their horses on the other bank, climbed shakily from the ferry. He seemed on the point of crying again, but Lecky looking at him admiringly, thought that as strong and bright a glow came from Xerxes as came from Papa. She told Xerxes so.

"No," he said. "I was scared to death. I'm a coward. But I'm going to keep on practising not being afraid. I'll practice on Alhambra next, every day riding to school."

Lecky started to make a face at the mention of school, but she didn't complete it. It would be fun, she decided resolutely, to help Tina scrub the floor and wash the windows for the new teacher.

Looking across the river, she noticed that the spears of new grass were tinting the bank with a delicate green. And suddenly the bleak bluffs of Wyoming seemed to shine with a soft, friendly light.

Strange things happen
when war comes to the
tourists' South Seas.

by Kenneth
Perkins

*As the crowd pressed
her close, he heard
her say: "I knew
you were what I was
hunting for when I
first saw you!"*



Café of Adventurers

ON the beach at Hiva Hiva there is a combination lodging-house, sea grill, filling-station and pool-room called the "Café des Aventuriers." At one time the name meant what it said. Adventurers from other islands of the French Mandate actually did gather here to spin their yarns. But after the War broke out the place gradually became deserted.

The proprietor did not know what to do about it. He understood well enough why the French planters gathered at the other hotel which was owned by one of their own countrymen. With this War on, they wanted to talk over their troubles by them-

selves. But the copra traders and skippers gradually dropped out too. Today, for instance, even with a boat from Papete in port, nobody had come near the place.

That is, nobody except a beachcomber. And he couldn't pay for his drink. He was a fat slob of a fellow, nude from the waist up, his chest blue with tattoo that had spread in the tropics. He caged the drink by offering to exchange a secret for it.

The café owner, Hercule Harding, was the son of a Yankee father and a French mother, hence it was hard to put anything over on him. "Tell me the secret first and I'll know how much liquor to put in this glass."

The beachcomber swatted at the green-bellied flies that had followed him into the buffet. "Well, it's this. You're still young. Not thirty yet by a long shot, and that scar on your face makes you look romantic—"

Hercule Harding started to replace the bottle under the bar mirror.

"Wait now, for God's sake! I'm telling you something. There's a girl on that Papete boat this morning comes ashore. She's staying over till the Pacific is safer for a young lady traveling and she maybe can get to Honolulu. She's got skin kind of transparent white like coconut milk, and her eyes! And her shape—you never saw a Kanaka girl or a mestiza

or nobody like her in your born days! And she's from the States—worked on a 'Frisco paper there. And since Pearl Harbor she's stranded down in these waters. What do you think of that? Hurry up with that drink!"

"Bill Muffins," Harding said, filling the glass to the brim with rum, "that deserves what I mean a real drink!"

Muffins drained it and slowly a change came over his bloated face, his red eyes, his sere salty lips. He turned actually radiant.

"I got another secret," he added.

"Get out of here! I'm busy. I'm going to town to find that girl you—go on, get out!"

"Yes, but I told you a good one. Here's a girl from the States, and you want to show her a good time, don't you? But you got to make some money first. I'll tell you how."

THIS beachcomber, Harding knew, lived on the other side of the island above the mangrove swamps. He might have found some flotsam or ambergris, perhaps a new reef that hadn't been grubbed clean of its pearl oysters. Harding got the bottle down again. "Go ahead, shoot."

"There's a barkentine anchored in Dernière Lagoon. Why anchor there, unless you're in trouble and hiding? You know that old smuggler named Crawford?"

"Sure. Used to come here in my dad's time. Got out of Bilibid Prison at Manila. He's a bad one."

"And the barkentine he's master of, it's a Jap-owned ship. He always stayed in the Jap mandate getting copra for 'em for explosives. But he's down here. How's that for a secret?"

Harding poured a small drink. "That's only worth a finger."

"But look, please. He's over there. Maybe got scared of that gunboat was here yesterday. So he's put in to hide. Now, look. If you took two barrels of rum over there, you could get any price you wanted."

Harding filled the glass a little fuller. "There's something to be said for the idea. Only," he stopped pouring, "I'm not leaving town till I check up on your first secret." He shoved the drink across the bar.

Bill Muffins drank it down. It made him affectionate. "Say listen, just because I like you I'm going to tell you another one." Harding started to take off his white jacket. "Now wait, don't hit me! I'm telling you something because you're my best friend. I don't want you to step into a bad jam. If you go over to that lagoon and some of Crawford's crew find you snooping around, you'll sure enough get your throat cut."

"That's no secret. So get out."

Hercule Harding shaved, pipeclayed his shoes, chalked his pith hat. But

because of certain events, and primarily because of the name of his hotel, he did not have to hunt for the girl. She hunted for him.

Bill Muffins was right three ways: First, Crawford's barkentine was hiding in Dernière Lagoon. Second, Harding would have risked getting his throat cut if he went near there. Third, this girl who came into the café was enough to knock any man's eyes out.

When he saw her, Harding felt such a thrill and shock that he was in desperate need of a drink, but too stupefied to reach for it. Although she was dressed in white from her hat to her bobby socks and sandals, she had more color and light to her, somehow, than the giant flowers against which she stood.

She wanted to interview the owner of this hotel, she said. When he said he was the owner, she looked at him in astonishment. Thus both of them seemed completely flabbergasted at finding each other in this remote French mandated paradise.

She explained that as soon as the Papete boat landed, and even before she had attended to the matter of finding lodgings, she had started right in to work. This had to do with her San Francisco paper. She was writing something about the effect of the War on these islands, but mainly she wanted characters—the kind you meet today in the South Pacific. "So I came here first thing."

She looked at him almost as if she were frightened, her violet eyes huge. Perhaps she was afraid, being alone with him in this deserted, flower-banked shack. Harding, with his lank, Yankee figure and his French eyes that glittered black, and that scar on his cheek, looked pretty tough. Or, as Bill Muffins called it, romantic.

"Yes," she said nodding, "you're like they said."

"Like who said?"

"In San Francisco they told me to be sure and stop at the Café of Adventurers. A friend told me he'd never been here without finding at least one trader or skipper to write about. And if there was no one else, he said, the proprietor could tell a yarn to top them all."

"Who, me?"

"I see you're too modest to talk about yourself. But I can start you off. Your folks were from Maine. You went to sea when you were just a boy. You got to be a pearl trader. Then you shipped on a whaler. Fin whales, wasn't it—around Australia? The fast slim ones? And you killed a giant octopus, only you never got over that fight. It was the beak of the octopus that gave you that—" She checked herself, seeing his hand go to the scar. "You had to give up the sea and settle down with a French

wife. She made you buy this hotel. Only—"

She checked herself again, staring hard for the third time.

"Only what?"

"You seem so young!" she exclaimed. "I don't know how to put it, but I expected to find an old man, grizzled and maybe limping because the octopus broke him. But you seem—" She saw the smile on one side of his mouth. "Are you really the man I'm talking about?"

"Everything you heard is true—the whaling, the pearl trading, the skippers that used to hang around here. And I own this hotel, because I inherited it and came back from the States where the depression was on full swing. They had it all straight in 'Frisco. But the Cap Harding they told you about wasn't me. It was my father."

The girl had been on the point of writing something, but she looked up, her face rather blank. "Even though it's a mistake, I think I can write something—perhaps? The love of adventure you inherited from your father?"

"Or the caution—from my mother."

"At least, you've been to sea?"

"Yes, to the States to school. But it wasn't in the fo'castle, not even in the black gang. It was the glory-hole. The most unromantic of all—the steward's department."

She glanced unconsciously at his scar again—quizzically, hopefully.

"This scar," he said, "I got it in the usual measly brawl, from a half-breed pantryman—not an octopus."

That was when she closed her notebook, the page blank.

HERCULE HARDING got himself a glass of rum when she was gone. The parrots and crows laughed at him while he drank. It made him mad. His father had made a go of this hotel, but he had not. The father had a way about him. Skippers hung around the place because he had been a master in sail, not steam. He had built up a name that made the place famous as far as 'Frisco! The hotel was his pride and it should have been the monument of his name and fame. But Hercule Harding—it was only too plain now—had let his father down!

He should have lied to the girl, boasted about his past. But he was not a boastful man. He had inherited that from his father at least. Cap Harding had never boasted. He had acted. His actions boasted for him.

Feeling the kick of the rum, Hercule Harding ran out to the compound just as the girl reached the street of nipa-thatched huts. "Just a second. Excuse me. But if you come back tonight you'll find the place like it used to be in my dad's day. Come kind of late, alone if you want, or maybe you

better bring somebody with you. The crew you'll meet here is pretty rough. The skipper's a regular pirate. Escaped from Bilibid when he was young. A regular sea-wolf of a hellion you can write a whole book about."

Her eyes flashed. "That sounds awfully good! I'll be here. But when I first saw you I thought, here's the sea-wolf type I've been looking for!"

Harding went to *Dernière Lagoon*.

A copra planter with a run-down old truck had enough gas to take him halfway. He walked the rest and got there at sunset. Perhaps it was that glass of rum taken when the equatorial sun was at its hottest, but his idea had seemed fairly practicable at the time.

BUT there was one secret old Bill Muffins did not know. Crawford had used the hotel as a hide-out once. For three months Harding's father had taken care of him. The young Harding would remind him of that point and invite him to spend the night at the old place again, and drink his fill of free drinks, and bring any of his crew he wanted. If they came in the barkentine's long-boat around the island they could take back two barrels of rum. Crawford could hardly refuse. He was known to be a straight shooter for all his smuggling, and Harding would point out that the name of his father's hotel was at stake. It was to be written up so that San Francisco shipping circles would hear about it once more!

Besides there was a girl to be won.

Peering through the screen of lianas at the top of a cliff, Harding saw the hidden lagoon. Bill Muffins was right again: There was the barkentine at anchor, almost completely surrounded by the overhanging jungle.

She was a perfect rig for South Pacific wind and water, the fore-and-aft rig good for long reaches, the square-rigged foremast helping in quatering gales. He knew she was Crawford's ship because no other man, aside from a copra trader or two, could have brought a vessel of that size through the dangerous currents and rock motus into this hidden lagoon.

Part of the crew had come ashore in a little lugger and were gathering limes and breadfruit. Harding took a chance and walked right down on them.

Two men jumped out of the cockpit of the beached lugger, the moment he broke out of the brush. This did not surprise him. Two more men ran out of the thick bank of papayas and lime-trees, dropped their baskets of fruit and drew guns. They were dressed like regular fo'castle boomers, but they were not white men. Perhaps they were Malays. Malay pirates. This was not surprising either—or even alarming, for their master, Crawford, had a big mixture of races in his crew,



So Harding jumped him even though he had his gun and fired a shot that burned Harding's ear.

garnered from many Pacific boarding masters. The lowest dregs—even Japs.

Harding held his hand up, waving a greeting and then discovered that three more men had come out of the jungle behind him so that he was surrounded.

A squat little man, their bosun perhaps, came forward, scowling. His head which was as ugly as a coconut idol, tilted upward so he could look at Harding's face. He had buck teeth and flat cheekbones. "Yes, you want something?" He did not ask it in French. Evidently he could spot this man immediately as an American.

"I want to see Crawford?"

"How?"

"The master of your ship," Harding said, feeling a sudden qualm. This bosun was a Jap. But that did not mean much, for Crawford's barkentine, Harding reflected, was Jap-owned. He went on steadily: "I'm a friend of Bob Crawford—that's who I want."

The other men had come up slowly and they looked at their bosun and at each other puzzled. They were not wrinkled like their spokesman. They were younger, with flint-hard eyes and plump yellow necks and big-toothed mouths. They talked in Japanese.

Harding began to realize that he had stepped into a lot of trouble. This was not Crawford's crew. Nor was that his barkentine. That is to say,

not any more. He must have given up his command, or been kicked off sometime before Pearl Harbor doubtless. After all, Bob Crawford was a white man. Harding said dismally:

"May I come aboard?"

One or two gave slobbery Jap chuckles, even though their eyes glinted. The bosun said: "But who you? I like to know very much. Who you?"

"My name's Harding. I own the sea grill over at Hiva Hiva. Crawford will remember my dad; my dad helped him out many a time when he was in trouble—with this very ship. Get that? I'm anxious to see him. I'm in trouble."

The bosun nodded. "Trouble. Yes. Plenty I think so." Then he grunted, "You ask, 'Come aboard?' It is a joke? Why you talk that way? You watch us from cliff, like spy. Please explain. Never mind."

HE gave some orders in Japanese. Two of his crew grabbed Harding and marched him to the beached lugger. The whole gang came aboard with their packets of limes and breadfruit and mangoes. They made their prisoner sit on a pile of oyster shells. He lit a cigarette and puffed fast.

"All right," he said, shrugging his shoulders. "What's your next play?"

As if in answer, a man poked his whiskered brown head out of the

*The bosun nodded.
"Trouble. Yes. Plenty
I think so."*



cabin door, grinning. To his enormous relief, Harding discovered that he knew the man—a half-breed pearl trader from Hiva Hiva who grubbed the reefs on this side of the island. And this was his lugger!

"You stepped into planty trouble, eh, m'sieur?" the trader said.

"Say, listen. I know this fellow!" Harding said to his captors. "His name's Gervais. Hi, Gervais, how goes it? You tell 'em I wasn't spying on 'em."

To his enormous relief, the half-breed did him this little favor. Not so little either, but a matter of life or death. "But yes," Gervais said to the Japs. "This man is all right. I know him. I will be responsible he tells no one what he knows. I will take care of him myself—me, Gervais."

But the bosun said. "Let him tell Commander." He turned to the prisoner. "You have some more cigarette, I think so?"

Harding passed his package around while the gasoline-driven tub put off, Gervais at the tiller, Harding near him

still seated on the shell mound, on deck.

Approaching the big barkentine, Harding stared across the darkening water with the feeling that this did not look as much like Crawford's ship as he had at first thought. Looking at her now from water level instead of down from the cliff, he saw that the main hatchway coaming was ridiculously high. Even though it was as high as the caboose just aft of it, it did not interfere with a barkentine's rigging, since there was no boom of a the main hatchway, Harding guessed, fore-and-aft rig on the foremast. Over there was a disguised jury-gun turret.

WHEN the lugger bumped alongside the bigger vessel, the bosun went up the Jacob's ladder. In the dusk, Harding could see a long line of men, dark as shadows, peering down from the rail. When one of them lit a cigarette, the light flared on his bulging spectacles. One of them came down the ladder—a thick man with two medals on his barrel-like chest.

He ordered the Japs in the lugger to go up with their baskets; then he looked down at the prisoner.

In a high feminine voice that should have boomed, he asked; "How you know, here was Crawford's ship?"

Harding made up a good lie. "It's got around town. Somebody saw the barkentine, recognized her."

This seemed to throw everyone into a panic. The officer barked some more orders to his crew up there lining the rail. Then again in fairly good English to the prisoner, "This man Gervais say you all right. Story about Crawford sound maybe all right. But,"—evidently explaining politely why Harding must be shot—"but if Hiva Hiva do not know about this ship, you cannot go tell them. Sorry. Gervais keep you safe."

"That's reasonable," Harding said.

"Of course, M'sieur Harding," the half-breed Gervais said. "He only means I keep you from getting back to Hiva Hiva before this ship she has time to put to sea. Then we sail back, you and me together, no?"



Gervais, it was quite obvious by now, was in the pay of these Japs. He might have tipped them off about that gunboat that had passed the Island the night before. That perhaps was the explanation of this ship's putting into the lagoon to hide. "And it was this measly Gervais who brought them in!" Harding reflected. "He could have piloted them in by sailing his lugger through the rocks and motus while the big barkentine followed."

THE officer went aboard and Gervais cast off. He was grinning through his whiskers and shaking his head. "Plenty trouble and all for no fault of your own." He got his engine popping, stood off, then slipped the clutch for just enough speed for steerageway.

Harding slouched on his elbows against a scuttle butt. He noticed that the pearl trader had a gun nosed to his thigh with the holster un-

flapped. It would have been possible to jump him but not when they were this close to the raider. He kept this in mind, however, as Gervais turned the lugger's nose seaward.

It got dark with the suddenness of a South Sea sunset. The barkentine, etched black, hung midway in red air for there was no difference between sky and the mirror of the lagoon. Harding could hear soft-pitched but soprano commands from the poop, evidently to make sail. They had no lights on her, so he could not tell just what they were doing. But he could hear the clang of anchor chain, the swish of water and ooze dripping phosphorescence. He heard the faint throb of a screw beating the water astern, spreading a twinkle of white water and sea-fire. The pulsation came across the lagoon. The barkentine was going to stand out, clearly enough, not under sail, but on her own power!

Gervais faced him from the back of the cockpit and steered for the sea. "You are all right now, m'sieu. Be content. They were going to shoot you. But I told them you did not know that Crawford was in Bilibic prison again—until the Japs got to Manila!"

"And I didn't know this was a raider either—the one that sank a New Zealand ship off Suva last month."

"That is none of our affair," Gervais said. "I grub for pearls here and this barkentine comes along. They want to stand in for fresh water and limes. So I say, *Bien*, stand in. Use the lead plenty and never offer to run with the tide in these South Sea islands.' That's all I know about them."

It was a good yarn, but obviously an alibi. Why would these Japs trust a prisoner to this half-breed pearl trader if he were not in their pay? The trader had a radio sending-set somewhere, no

doubt, and had kept in touch with them.

"You didn't know, Gervais, that she sank a British phosphate commission ship off the Carolines?"

"Hell-dam! I tell you I know nothing. Except you scared them telling about Hiva Hiva knowing a ship was hiding here. So they're putting out before the ebb."

Harding felt the first buck of the tide that came in through the barrier reef. The lugger jerked up her blunt nose and smacked into it.

"Look, Gervais, I'm in a hurry to get to Hiva Hiva. There's a girl I want to meet at my hotel tonight. I promised her a good party."

"It is hard picking this channel. You talk too much, my frand."

Gervais was right. Around them every way, the tide churned, now in the great westward pull of the South Equatorial current, now southward to join the West Wind drift. Gervais kept his mind on what he was doing. And Harding kept his mind on something else:

Gervais was not going to take him back to Hiva Hiva at all. This half-breed would be clapped into jail as soon as Harding went to the Colonial Administrative Office and told on him. Gervais was going to shoot him, of course, and give him the "Deep Six." The Japs knew it. Doubtless they had told Gervais to do away with the prisoner in the quietest manner possible. Not there in the lagoon, where a gunshot might possibly be heard in the jungle before the Jap ship got out to sea. Gervais must have decided to take him well out to sea himself before giving him the "Deep Six." The decision was stark.

So Harding jumped him. He did it as the lugger rounded a small hummock when for that one moment the barkentine was out of sight. Gervais knew he was safe as long as the raider was in view and that was why he was caught so completely off his guard. One crack knocked him to the bottom boards, even though he had his gun out and had squeezed off a shot that burned Harding's ear. Quite a quick draw, Harding thought!

There was no time to pick up the gun for the lugger began swinging around to the tide. She was out in the open again, in view of the barkentine, although Harding could barely see the big vessel which was now black against the velvet blackness of the jungle.

The lugger chugged on, heading for a hummock which was covered with guano and hence loomed white. Harding leaped for the tiller. Knowing he could not get around in time, he caught the blow alongside and plunged into a swirl of white water in the new channel. A comber crashed

over them as they got through the reef, and it was this dousing that brought Gervais out of his knock-out.

Harding threw him against a bulkhead. "You stay there in the corner, you slimy old porpoise!" He had to shout because there was noise, lots of it—the deafening thunder of that surf, the barking of the engine going full tilt, the Trades hitting them of a sudden once they were out of the lee of those motus. He shouted at the top of his lungs: "I'll tie you up and lock you in your cabin when I get my bearings. We're hauling over for Hiva Hiva. Got an engagement there. You and me both!"

He left the tiller a moment, found the gun in the bottom boards, and felt better. But over the lugger's quarter he saw a green light at some distance and the long arm of a searchlight sweeping the ground swells. That searchlight made everything else pitch dark of a sudden. Harding wondered if the raider had seen him change places with Gervais at the tiller. Not likely. But it looked now as if they were hunting for him.

They could hunt all night. For, reaching the lee of a promontory of wind-thrashed palms, Harding was safe from that light. It was clear sailing now. He felt great. It would be a fine yarn to tell that American girl.

But he must tell it right, with a lot of townspeople gathered in his café listening to him. The French planters and traders would be glad to come and drink with him now! He had never renounced the citizenship of his father, so he was an American; but he had performed a service for what remained of bleeding and helpless France—the France of his mother. The service might be of great benefit—the capture of this Gervais, who should have been named Laval! But whether it was of great consequence or not, Harding's hotel—his dad's old place—would live again. "The Café of Adventurers—I'm the adventurer!"

Of course, if he could have caught a few of those chuckling, stinking Japs—that would have made the adventure something to write about! But right now he could think of the fun he was going to have telling the girl; "I promised I'd have somebody you could write up in your San Francisco paper. Well, what's wrong writing me up?"

He had a fantastic notion that the news of his strange journey had preceded him. For when he sailed around the point into Hiva Hiva's bay, he was astonished to see a crowd on the harborside. The long pier was lighted and teeming with life; Kanakas lined the beach; the five cars of the Island—the Resident's car, a taxi and three copra trucks jammed the landward end of the pier, their lights crossing the acetylene flares. He could not understand how it happened. But

there was no doubt about it: during the long time he had taken to sail around the Island, the town had gathered to give him an ovation. They had heard about it, of course, over the radio. But whose radio?

When he stepped up to the pier, he awoke gradually from this pleasant dream. He noticed that no one in the crowd cheered.

Before he had a chance to announce that he had a prisoner trussed up in the cabin, an official from the Colonial Administrative Bureau stepped up to him. "You saw something of the engagement, M'sieu Harding?"

"What engagement?"

"Our armored *paquebot* put out this afternoon and just now radioed that they found a barkentine which is a disguised Japanese raider."

Hercule Harding gaped as he tried to think. Those lights that had seemed to be "far off" were not from the raider at all. They were the *paquebot's* lights and searchlight!

"You see, our *paquebot* boarded the Jap vessel and their radio message to the Colonial Office reported that they took the whole Jap crew prisoner. That's what we're waiting for. The town will celebrate. Our heroes will be escorted to the hotel and awarded the honors they deserve!"

HERCULE HARDING saw the Chief of Bureau of the Administrative Office in the car with the fat little Resident Magistrate. A band of eight pieces was tuning up under the palms. Kanaka girls waited with ginger leis. The leis were for the necks of the French marines, not for Hercule Harding.

"You're bringing them all up to my hotel, did you say?" he asked with a sudden inspiration.

"Well, hardly, m'sieu. You see perhaps it is more appropriate to hold the celebration at the other hotel. This is a patriotic affair, and a French hotel—er— But you will join us, of course?"

Harding shook his head. He wondered if that girl was in the crowd. No, she was probably at the "other hotel." He said casually, "By the way, I've got that breed Gervais in the cabin. I'm turning him over to you."

"What for? Gervais! But what is this about!"

"He's in the pay of those Japs. He showed them how to get into that lagoon. Anything else you want to know, you'll find me at my hotel."

THE crowd's sudden interest in the arrest of Gervais gave Harding a chance to elbow his way along the pier to the beach.

He walked to his hotel, his feet burning, his bones aching. His rope-soled sandals were torn from his walk through the jungle, and his whole body throbbed. When he limped into

his hotel, he found it lighted but empty.

His Chinese cook doubtless had gone down to the beach for the big hula. Harding took a glass of rum out to the deserted veranda where he could sip it, brooding. He listened to the moan of the palms and the surf, and the muffled hubbub of the crowd on the waterfront. He sat alone for an hour. He was in the loneliest spot between San Francisco and the Tropic of Capricorn.

IT was just his luck, when a pretty girl was in on a boat from Papete! The whole town was going to the other hotel instead of coming here as they did in his father's time. She would have adventurers to write about at that hotel—all she wanted! Heroes! The capture of a Jap raider by a steamboat with a three-inch gun and a couple of one-pounders—there was a saga! "I can't beat that! All I captured was a half-breed fifth columnist cockroach."

He saw the *paquebot* now, standing in through the reef, warping to the crowded pier. The band hooted, piped, beat the drowsy air into waves like the rhythm of breakers. From where he sprawled on his rattan chair, he could see them coming ashore with their long line of squat, buck-toothed prisoners. He got up half-heartedly to go down to the waterfront and join the hula.

But in passing through his buffet, he took another drink. It helped the ache of his feet and his heart. It made him forget that his knuckles were split and smarting from that blow he had given the forgotten Gervais. "She might come," he said to himself, sprawling again. "She said she'd come."

Half an hour later he looked up at the veranda door of his café and saw her standing there. He realized vaguely, looking across her white shoulders and beyond the glow of her hair which the café lighted, that several people had come in. He also noticed beyond the café that some Kanakas had gathered in the garden on the landward side of the hotel.

He got up and went to the girl. "Thanks for coming. You didn't have to do it. You're missing something in town—everything you expected to find here you'll find at the other hotel. Will you have a drink?"

"Yes. Thanks. I heard all about it and saw a lot of it. They gave the crew quite an ovation. They're heroes of course. But you're the type I've been looking for. I told you that first thing, didn't I? I'd rather talk to you again."

"Me?" He shrugged. "I had an adventure, yes. The first one in my life. But I was scared stiff. Did you come here alone?" When she nodded,

he said, "Come on into the buffet for that drink. Some people are coming in here. Let's be alone."

Yes, some people had come in and they followed Harding and the girl into the buffet. To Harding's surprise, a French planter or two, a tapioca merchant, a trading schooner captain all talked to him at once.

"Like the old days, eh, you big walrus!" the skipper said, slapping him on the back. "Like Cap Harding's times!"

"It was *glorieuse*, m'sieur!" a trader said fervently. They all jabbered like crows. "What you have done for the glory of France!"

Someone else was talking to the girl so that Harding gradually got the notion that the raider must have been horsed on a reef and wrecked *before* she was captured!

"Not a shot fired!" the tapioca merchant said. "The whole crew taken prisoner while the surf smothered over the decks!"

"They couldn't fight with their ship going to pieces under them. You're all right, Harding!" the schooner captain said. "A chip off the old block!"

"M'sieu, it was *magnifique* this that you 'ave done today!" said another planter. "The Resident Magistrate is coming direct to pay you *honneur*!"

Five cars honked outside. More patrons crowded in. But they did not order drinks or sit at tables. They crowded around Hercule Harding, crushed the girl against him so that he had to put his arm around her.

Now he found himself facing the flushed excited clerk from the Colonial Bureau. "That man Gervais confessed everything, M'sieur Harding! You were too modest to tell us, so we made him tell. He confessed that he was piloting the raider out—by going ahead with his lugger and thus showing the pass. He did not go aboard as any pilot would, but stayed in his little lugger for a very good reason."

"Sure. I figured that all out," Harding said, not knowing what the reason was at all.



"Of course you figured it out! And very clever of you! There was just enough light from the sunset for the raider to follow Gervais' lugger through the rock motus. Gervais confessed their plan: As soon as they got to safe water past the reef, he was to turn on his running lights and head south, the raider north. Thus if any enemy craft were about, the lights of Gervais would decoy them. But you put in the very clever monkey-ranch!"

"Sure, you've got it just right," Harding said, but he looked as if he had been hit on the chin.

With the whole café jammed now, and the fat little Resident Magistrate waddling in, Harding could not quite understand what this had to do with him. But he had a vague glimmer of the truth. Something had happened while he was bringing the little lugger out through the reef. The banging of the surf had deafened him. And he had to keep his eyes straight forward on the white guano of the rocks. Perhaps the thing had happened without much of a crash—the knifing of the barkentine's hull by a submerged ridge of coral, the slow wallowing and the banging of surf over the old tub as she foundered.

WHEN the Resident Magistrate made his speech he understood it all, and then Kanaka girls came up with lei wreaths to put around the hero's long, Yankee neck. The band played and so did a dozen ukuleles. Here was a hula!

"I announce it to this whole café of people, M'sieur Harding!" the Resident said. "And it will be announced over and over again in this café in songs and down in the village in the songs and *parapores* of our natives: How you wrecked this wolf-ship single-handed! How they thought they were following their pilot Gervais when they followed you! And how you enticed them through the reefs at the most dangerous turn of the currents and tides! Will you make a speech at us, m'sieur?"

"No. Except, yes," Hercule Harding said. "There's a coincidence about this whole set-up that I haven't figured out. Just how did your *paquebot* happen to be there at Dernière Lagoon right in the nick of time?"

"A no-account beachcomber named Muffins told us the raider was there, so naturally we sent our *paquebot*," the Resident explained. "This afternoon this man Muffins was caging drinks in every taproom in town in exchange 'for a secret'. And 'creé bon sang de bon jour! What a secret!'"

As the crowd pressed the girl close to him, Hercule Harding felt her hand clutching his, squeezing. He heard her voice close to his ear.

"I knew you were what I was hunting for when I first saw you!"

GUERRILLAS at

TANIA made the futile gesture of bolting the door for the night; then she dropped her hand in discouragement, and listened attentively. She could hear the trucks with the enemy occupation troops rumbling into the smoking and half-destroyed village.

She was well aware that it had been as ugly a village as any in Russia—with livestock prowling the streets; lacking sidewalks, pavements, lawns; in summer, chaffy dust, pungent smells, swarms of flies; in winter, mud ponds and scummy ditches, or bitter frost and sweeping icy winds.

She had never liked it, her tiny village. And yet now, knowing its cobblestones trampled by foreign boots, she felt as piercing a pain as though they were trampling on her own heart.

She turned from the door and saw Shura standing in the middle of the room, bare-headed, an expectant grin on his face, the usual mixture of shrewdness and mockery in his eyes. Gun in hand and begrimed up to his short light hair he looked like some dangerous highwayman.

"King of the scoundrels!" Tania greeted him, her heart still full of bitterness. "How did you get in here? And what do you want this time?"

He quickly strode over to her. His light eyes, squinting with merriment, roved impudently up and down her fragile, shapely figure in the yellow bodice, went caressingly, searchingly over her face. "You know what I want!" he said with a brief laugh. "But I don't want it right now. I have something else to do first."

"Get out of here before *Dedoushka* comes down from upstairs! This time he's ready to murder you, you unclean soul!"

"The old man!" Shura grimaced. "Why, haven't you two changed at all? I thought with all that's happened lately—"

Tania interrupted him with an impatient gesture. "In spite of all that's happened, you're still the same persistent scoundrel, with the same smirk in your eyes. If you haven't changed, why should we? You still aren't welcome here!"

"Words of truth!" An irritable, hollow voice broke from above, and old Stepan appeared at the head of the stairway. "Send him to the devil, the curl!" Everything about the old man was tall and narrow—his legs,

clad in knee-high boots; his gaunt figure, covered with the long blue peasant tunic; his weather-beaten face, his unkempt beard.

He descended the stairs in great haste amid a loud creaking of steps. Shura, standing broad-legged at the foot, addressed him laughingly: "Why don't you join the real fighting, instead of belching out your gall against your granddaughter's best lover?" He gave the girl a meaning glance, but she looked away ostentatiously, crossing her arms on her chest in a hostile gesture.

"You're a fine one to talk!" Stepan angrily stamped the floor. "A young man like you, strong and healthy like an ox, and neither dead nor fighting!" He spat at Shura's feet.

"But I am, I am fighting!" Shura protested. "That's why I am here." He paused, looked at Tania. "You have *always* been dead wrong about me," he complained good-naturedly, wagging his head. "When we had to retreat, a whole division was left behind to scatter in the back of the enemy. The job fell to the best division. . . . My division!" he pointed out, pounding his chest.

"So you didn't desert?" Tania asked quickly, tossing back her head. "Why do you always expect the worst of me?"

"I have never seen a braggart who was worth half his words."

"Stop the idle chatter!" the old man roared impatiently. "What brought you here, you scum?"

"See this gun?" Shura waved the sub-machine-gun temptingly before Stepan's nose. "It's the best Tommy gun we have, with a sawed-off barrel to make it handier. I am here to hide it. Have you a good place for it?"

"Why don't you use it instead of hiding it?" Stepan thundered belligerently.

"Yes, why don't you?" Tania challenged in turn.

Shura made a gesture of annoyance. "Those are my orders! No use meeting them now like a mad dog, while they swarm all over the country-

side. We must stay put for a couple of days, and then, when their lines have thinned out—"

"Show me that gun!" Stepan demanded, extending a black hand. "It isn't even half as big as a shotgun!" he added contemptuously.

"Hands off!" Shura jealously pressed the weapon to his chest with both hands. "This gun is white fire! At a hundred paces it cuts a man in two with bullets. . . . *Clack!* Thus you take it apart. And *clack!* Together again. See?"

Now Stepan stood overawed with admiration. Then he mumbled, caressing the weapon with a timid, trembling hand. "He is a beauty. . . . He is so small and slender—"

"Show him the hiding-place, *Dedoushka*, for the love of heaven!" Tania reminded. "You know they are after firearms like swine after truffles!"

"There is no danger," Shura said. "They never venture near an unknown house at night."

"Follow me!" Stepan cried, flushed with excitement, his little dark eyes sparkling beneath his bushy eyebrows. "Give me a light, little one!"

"Don't let him raid the larder," Tania admonished calmly, lighting a second kerosene lamp and handing it to the old man.

STEPAN led Shura across the kitchen and down the cellar stairs. The cellar was dark and bare; it had retained the smell of the melons that had been stored during the autumn; cobwebs and fungus covered the wall. The old man removed an empty barrel from a corner, scraped up the sawdust on the floor with his boots, and produced the handle of a trapdoor. From there a slim ladder led to a small room underneath.

"Here's where we sometimes hide small things—a little food, a little wine," Stepan explained modestly while they descended. "No real hoarding, you know. . . . Just to provide against a rainy day."

"That's hoarding, all right!" Shura exclaimed loudly.

"No one likes to live from hand to mouth," Stepan remarked soberly. He strode toward the farthest wall. "If you remove those two stones here, you'll find another little cubbyhole. There your gun will be safe."

"Another hiding-place? What for?" Shura began to remove the stones.

HANS RUESCH is a young Swiss Protestant who started his career as a motorcar racing driver, and participated in more than one hundred races in Europe. In 1939 his first novel won such immediate success in Switzerland that it was translated into other languages. In 1939 also he immigrated to the United States.

BAY

A drama of war behind the German front in Russia

by Hans Ruesch

"That," Stepan explained with dignity, "is where we *really* hoard. You see, sometimes our state authorities, with their usual deplorable lack of faith in human honesty, used to come to search our house for hidden goods. Once they had discovered that first hiding-place, which I kept almost empty, they would never look further."

"You deserve to be shot!" Shura cried indignantly. He had opened the entrance to the cubbyhole that, for all the scant light permitted to observe, was well stacked with bags of flour, casks of sugar and fat. He got rid of his sub-machine-gun, then carefully replaced the stones.

"Perhaps all men with wits deserve to be shot," the old man reflected on their way back.

For a while he had been unwontedly deferential toward Shura, as though seduced by the sight of the gun. Now, eager to get rid of him, he motioned unceremoniously to the door. But Shura blithely ignored the hint. He went to the window and sat back in a chair, throwing out his feet.

"All those books she reads put ideas into her head!" He gestured toward the wall, where a number of volumes were stacked high on a shelf. Then he turned to Tania, who was tidying up. "You are very beautiful, my little swallow, but you are too pale and frail for a peasant lass; and in spite of all you've read, you know too little about life, and nothing about men."

"Are you going to tell me again what a good bargain you are?"

"Sure!" Shura grinned. "You still long for fairyland! Your heart is sick with yearning, ignorance and youth. . . . If you knew more about real men than about the ones in the books, you'd know they come no better. I am seldom drunk. . . . I am strong and good-looking—"

"Who ever said so?" Tania inquired guardedly.

"The girls tell me! Girls who know!"

Tania turned her head in disgust. "A good-looking ox," she said.

Shura almost choked with laughter, slapping his thigh. Then he said: "It would do you no harm to be stronger yourself. As you are, you need a man to take care of you, and I am that man."

"I need no one!" she said, facing him, arms akimbo, and lifting her little chin. "Don't talk to me as though I were a girl of sixteen."

"I know you're eighteen!" Shura laughed. "And the older you'll get, the more you'll need someone. And you'll never find another like me."

"I hope not."

"But now, my dove, if your heart were as tender as your skin, you would fix me up some supper."

"Give him something and let's get rid of him!" Stepan urged.

"This," Tania said lightly as she went to the kitchen, "is the way it usually ends when Shura calls me 'my dove' and 'my little swallow': all he wants is something to eat."

"Curse it all! You know that's not all I want!"

"What kind of talk is this!" Stepan thundered, kicking the dust from the floor.

Shura smirked at him. "Is it never going to enter your old skull? Tania doesn't know it yet, but she is going to be mine, if I have to marry her."

"Scum of the earth! Grab your victuals and get out of here before I lose my patience!"

Shura stuffed his mouth with some of the buttered dark bread and ham Tania had brought him, and chewed away happily. Then, wiping his lips with his sleeve and screwing up his eyes in satisfaction, he got up, preparing to leave. At the door he turned around. Tania was rhythmically tapping the floor with the toe of her shoe; the old man was prowling around the table, his eyes fixed on Shura, impatiently waiting for his departure. "I go, but I shall be back," Shura said reassuringly. He listened. Outside all had quieted down. He opened the door. "When we'll have children, my little berry, I'll throw all your books into the ditch. Our children, I want them dumber and stronger." He tossed a last laugh at them by way of salutation, and slammed the door behind him.

There were things other than men about which Tania knew little; and



now she brooded over them as she lay awake, staring into the starlight that filtered through the window-panes and filled her room with a silvery hue. How perfect the silence could be now! How the stars could shine cold and beautiful as ever, while the rake of fire and iron advanced unceasingly into the heart of her country, leaving in its wake a monstrous trail of smoking ruins and a soil soaked deep with blood!

Her four brothers had long ago heeded the call to the colors. . . . Then the villagers had received the order from the Defence Council to set the barns, the haystacks, the granaries afire; to destroy all stores, keeping only enough for their immediate needs; to pollute the wells with manure and to drive the cattle into the forests. Tania remembered how the first tank column had rumbled in before the demolition crews had managed to destroy the collective farm and all the homesteads—how the roaring, rattling steel monsters, mud-caked, battle-scarred and bristling with guns, had passed without even

halting, their mere appearance scattering the few remaining villagers.

Only Tania's *dedoushka*, old crazy belligerent Stepan, had wanted to remain on the soil where he had been born, in the house he had helped to build. Under the Czar he had tasted the knout of the Cossack; he had weathered the inquisitiveness of the political commissar; and now he was not going to flee the German soldier.

And Tania had remained with him, because she could not leave the old man alone—not because he needed help, but restraint.

As to Tania herself, she had never needed anybody's help, as she had told Shura. And yet—what would happen to her if her brothers never returned? If this homestead, the only port she had ever known, were to be swept away? Her thoughts irresistibly went to her boastful, swaggering swain.

And thinking of him out there in the night all alone, she felt a sudden chill and a pang of fear for him, and she pulled the blankets close over her shoulders.

"Don't get hurt—too much," she mumbled as though he could hear her. And she knew his laughing answer: "Bullets miss me regularly, my little pink suckling pig!"

She knew all his answers!

She heard the old man puttering about restlessly, clambering up and downstairs, slamming doors, grumbling to himself. Then all grew quiet.

Later on the crack of a rifle broke the silence. She jumped up in her bed, listening breathlessly, but nothing further happened—until the Germans came to the house.

The sky was livid with dawn when they came to search the place through and through. During the night one of their men had been shot, and they were hot on the trail of the assailant. They discovered the dummy hiding-place underneath the cellar, but not the cubbyhole beyond, where Shura had left his sub-machine-gun.

Only a small garrison, some two hundred troops, had been placed in the village. As Tania's homestead was the best of the few buildings left, the officer in command, Hauptmann



"King of scoundrels!" Tania greeted him, her heart bitter. "How did you get in here?"

Streier, a fleshy man, loud-voiced, decided to make it his headquarters.

Tania and the old man were allowed to stay—Tania, because they wanted her to cook and wait on them, and perhaps also because she was pretty; as to Stepan, they had found him in his bed howling with pain, one of his long legs set in a primitive splint and swathed in ragged bandages. Tania explained that the old man had broken his thigh falling down the stairway in the dark; but he was so noisy and grouchy that he was transferred to the adjoining shed, where he could fuss and fume amid mice and the odor of rotten straw.

Half a dozen officers and their orderlies now filled the best room. Radio transmitter and receiver were forever going full blast. Timoshenko's army was recapturing village after village in a powerful counteroffensive that was daily gaining momentum, and the news dampened the spirits of the occupation troops. They were forever tensely on the alert, grim and watchful—most of them scattered over the approaches to the village; others busy setting up machine-guns and installing a few heavier pieces in the event of some Russian counterattack or a foray of some guerrilla detachment; the remainder still feverishly searched for the sniper.

THAT night, leaning over the table, Hauptmann Streier discussed the matter with his staff.

"There must be someone hidden in the village. The girl has not left the house, and the one-legged Methuselah is out of the question, and it is impossible for anyone to have come past our lines and then got away again."

The others silently nodded assent.

"This is an ungodly country!" Streier frowned. He cursed furiously in a sudden outburst of anger. "A people full of treachery and deceit! Why do they fight us? Why don't they give in like all the others have done? Do you understand it?"

"Incomprehensible!" the others agreed indignantly.

"They are barbarians," Streier decided.

For a moment they were still, their eyes lost in thought. Knives in the back and shots in the dark! There seemed to be no end to it. Poison, treachery and deceit, the knife and the ax, the shotgun and the torch all contributed to turn the endless territory that fell under the treads of the tanks into a sticky cobweb through which the invaders could move but slowly, leaving telltale threads of red in the meshes.

Finally Streier spoke again. "We'll look over this house once more, and then I'll make a last inspection of the outposts myself. Tania, lass, go and get us some coffee!"



"Words of truth!" And old Stepan appeared.

Tania entered the kitchen and felt her knees buckle. There, over by the saucepans, large as life, stood Shura, zealously taking his fill.

She clutched his arm. "What are you doing here?"

"My little duck!" He tried to caress her with his free hand. "Is this your welcome? How about a samovar?"

"Don't you know this house is alive with them? And you can guzzle! Have you no sense at all? Aren't you afraid?"

"I am, my little berry! But I can die of hunger quicker than of fear. Besides, I couldn't leave the village last night—they had closed a tight ring all around. So I came back before dawn, and when they came down to inspect the cellar, I cuddled up in the cubbyhole. But I can't live on flour."

"But how did you get into the house?" She spoke quickly, exasperated by his suicidal indifference.

"Oh, that was easy!" He waved. "I've known every way of getting into this house ever since my first wooing days. Did anybody ever let me in by the front door? This time I came in through the shed. I saw *Dedoushka* there. He tried to chase me away, the hunchbacked devil, and raised such a hue and cry that I thought the soldiers would come running."

"You're in for trouble, brother! They're going to search the house again. Go back to that cubbyhole and stay put until you hear from me, or

by all the devils, I'll hit you over the head with something heavy. If they find you and the gun—good-byl!"

While she pushed him down the stairs to the cellar, he managed to plant a kiss or two on her arm. She quickly passed her hand through his sunbleached hair.

About her skin was the scent of honey and hot earth. It made Shura's heart pound wildly. He felt that he loved her with every fiber of his body, with every beat of his heart.

He had not disappeared a moment too soon. Streier's young orderly opened the door and clamored for the coffee.

"Right away!" she said; and to hide her embarrassment, she added: "Won't you help me, please?"

After she had served the coffee, Tania limply dropped into a chair. Six men were again rummaging through the house, the shed and the cellar. She watched the officers drinking and plotting in their own language, which she did not understand. They paid no attention to her. This was just as good. Her brow was damp with sweat, and she was pale; and when she heard a clamor in the kitchen, she closed her eyes for an instant.

She had heard Shura's voice!

"We've got him!" Two men burst triumphantly into the room, shoving Shura before them. Shura cast bewildered glances about him. Then his eyes rested on Tania, who had come to her feet, shockingly pale.

The corporal who had led the search was telling: "We found him in a cubbyhole beyond the cellar, amid stacks of provisions. We haven't found any arms yet, but the other men are still searching."

Streier turned upon Shura. "Why were you hiding?"

"I did not want to go with our troops."

Illustrated by
Raymond Sisley



"No one else can be the culprit but you, arms or no arms." Streier told Shura.

"So you deserted?"

"Yes."

"That's what they all say!" Streier said despondently, turning toward his men. He passed his hand over his face. Then, leaning across the table, his brows knitted in a scowl, he snarled: "Where is your gun?"

Shura made a vague gesture. "I have no gun."

"We shall see about that!"

The searching party returned, empty-handed.

Disappointed and sullen, Streier turned for advice to Oberleutnant Frenzel, his second-in-command, a tall, gaunt man with protruding ears and a school-teacher appearance.

"He may have thrown the gun into a ditch after using it," Frenzel said, and the others agreed.

"No one else can be the culprit but you, arms or no arms," Streier told Shura in a conclusive tone.

At this point Tania stepped into the picture. She approached the table timidly, twisting her hands. "He is my betrothed," she said haltingly. "I know he never left the cellar. I was hiding him there."

"There is no place for this kind of game here, lass," Streier said curtly. "We must get rid of this toadstool, lover or not. Unless—unless someone else turns up before dawn, gun in hand." He got to his feet. "I am

going to make a last inspection of the outposts and sentries myself. You, Leutnant Gleiser, and you, Heinz, come with me." The Lieutenant and the orderly sprang to attention as their superior addressed them, then followed him, revolvers at the ready.

The other officers had settled down to a round of cards, ready for a night of coffee-drinking and radio-listening. They all spoke a few words of Russian, enough to order Tania around. She obeyed in silence, tense and pale. Shura was sitting on a bench, watched by two men.

Tania crept close to him, rubbed her shoulder against his. "What are we going to do, Shura?" she asked in a suppressed tone.

His eyes lit up as she came close to him. He smiled at her. "Let us make love," he suggested.

"A fine time to make jokes!"

"I can't pick my time, damn you!"

"Where on earth did you hide the gun? You didn't chew it up by any chance?"

Shura shrugged.

"Isn't it really you who killed that soldier last night?" she went on.

"What does it matter? Forget about it."

"But if they find the one who did it—"

"Forget about it!" he repeated dourly, and she grew still. . . .

An hour or so had passed since the commander had left for the inspection tour, when a sudden burst of machine-gun fire sounded so close to the house that the officers sprang to their feet. They looked at each other in utter amazement, pale and undecided. A Russian village was no place for a stroll these days. Finally Oberleutnant Frenzel said: "Let's see."

What they saw, only a hundred paces from the house, was Streier, Gleiser and Heinz in a wretched bloody heap.

"Let him go, now," Tania faced Oberleutnant Frenzel as soon as he returned. "I told you he had nothing to do with it."

Frenzel was livid, and waved her off; but she stubbornly insisted, clutching the officer by his tunic.

"For all I care, your yokel can go to the devil!" Frenzel finally condescended irritably.

"Go!" Tania waved to Shura, but Shura slowly sat down on the bench and watched the group of officers as they returned to the table again and grimly began to discuss the matter.

"No stone in this village has been left unturned," one of them was saying, "We've even rummaged through the ruins! We should have found not



only the man, but the hidden gun too! It's almost uncanny, you know!"

"If we don't find the sniper this time," Frenzel declared, "we'll blow this village off the map and then move into the open. We can't settle in a den of snakes."

A long, brooding silence followed. Then Frenzel said slowly: "The old man in the shed."

"What about him?"

"What about him, you dumb-bells? Now it's clear—it can't be anybody but he."

"With a broken leg?"

"Has anyone gone to the trouble of investigating whether his leg is really broken? No? Of course not!" He banged his fist down on the table, working himself into a rage. He got to his feet, stood stiffly upright with his hands pressed alongside his trouser legs as though standing at attention, and shouted, his throat and face swelling: "Get the doctor out of the hay! We'll soon find out! We'll have them all lined up against the wall!"

As the orderly raced off for the doctor, Tania told Shura: "They're

going to look over Grand-dad again!" But suddenly her mind cleared. She understood the truth, and everything reeled before her eyes. When she regained control of herself, she saw Shura slipping into the kitchen, on the way to the shed. A wild hope gave her new strength, almost intoxicated her—that Shura might yet find a way out. Shura always did. All the ways, in and out. . . .

Shura rushed down the few steps and into the shed. Seeing him, Stepan half-rose on his elbows; then, alarmed at the look on Shura's eyes, leaped to his feet and began to run, notwithstanding his splint. But Shura quickly caught up with him and grabbed him by the collar.

"Keep quiet, Daddy. If you can't produce a broken leg, you're in for more trouble than you can chew, and we with you. Don't be afraid; I'll make it short and sweet. Old bones break easily." And as the old man was putting up a valiant struggle, Shura knocked him senseless with a knuckle as hard as seasoned hickory.

Then he hurriedly began to remove the bandage, taking good care to keep the Tommy gun, used as a splint, within the bandages.

THE doctor—he was really only a young medical student—cursed loudly because he was roused from bed. His was a privileged position because medical men were scarce, and he could use abusive language whenever he

wanted, regardless of his rank. It was with undisguised satisfaction that he acknowledged that the old man's leg was indeed broken. He knew it was hard on his superior officer. "This is a beautiful fracture!" he said admiringly.

Frenzel flew into a rage, and spouted fire for half an hour. He lived up to his words. The village was torn down to the last wall, the last hut was burned to ashes, and the troops pitched their tents in the open a couple of miles away. . . .

That evening Tania and Shura sat on the heap of charred ruins that had once been Tania's homestead.

"It is like sitting by one's mother's deathbed," Tania said, heavy of heart.

From the grassy steppes a chill wind swept over them. Tania had no other shelter than Shura's body. She pulled in her head and nestled against his chest. Occasionally a crow called long and mournfully. In the distance the rumble of the field guns had resumed. It was Timoshenko's army, rolling the German lines back, pushing steadily closer.

They sat in silence under the cold stars. Then they heard Stepan's groans, groans of real pain.

"Let me go to look after him," Tania said.

"No. Not now." Shura closed his arms around her. "The least I can ask of him is to leave us alone for a while. Let him groan, the old devil."

"What's to become of us?" Tania said thoughtfully after a while.

"Are you afraid?"

"I never felt safer in all my life." She closed her eyes, burying her head deeper in his chest.

"But there are hard days ahead of us," Shura said. "There will be many more days of war. And even when the war is over, the soil of our country will be a poor soil to live on for a long time to come. . . . It is soaked with blood, and blood is poor manure. But," he went on after a while, "the blood will dry out sooner or later, and the soil never dries out, and never dies, and never goes away. Houses can crumble and men can fail you, but the soil is always there; it never lets you down. No one can ever destroy the soil and the seeds."

It was the first time that Tania had been unable to detect a sign of banter or raillery in Shura's voice. "He's become a real man," she thought, and felt the warm sense of contentment. It hardly occurred to her that perhaps he had spoken to her like this because he felt for the first time that she herself had become a full-grown woman—that at last she needed someone.

Drowsily, she mumbled: "We two are people of much luck!" Close to his body, she felt so warm and cosy that she dropped off to sleep.

The Beloved



A Legend Swordsmen of by Achmed

Omar the Black

"YES," repeated Omar the Black, "I need you. And so does Ayesha."

Omar the Red stared at his brother.

That the latter should need him, should want his help, his strength, his skill and bravery—well, why not? The notion pleased him, since he had as good a conceit of himself as the next man.

But what about Ayesha? Ayesha, who (so at least he liked to believe) had never been farther away from him, throughout the years, than the width of a passing thought—or belike, he reflected a little guiltily, the length of a passing kiss. . . .

Ah—many, many women's kisses!

He shook off the feeling of guilt as a dog shakes off water. He loved Ayesha, had always loved her, he told himself defiantly and, in a way, truthfully, in spite of all the others. And now she needed him. What had happened?

His heart skipped a beat. He gripped his brother's arm.

"Is she in danger?" he exclaimed.

"Not in danger of life or limb."

"What other danger is there?"

"Danger," replied Omar the Black, "to her happiness. You see, ever since you left the castle, she has been thinking of you, yearning for you—when, had she been a girl of better taste and sounder sense, she would have been thinking of *me*, yearning for *me*. . . . But," added Omar the Black, shrugging wide, flat shoulders, "it is as I told you. She refused me."

The other's lips thinned in a style that betokened temper. Anxiety relieved gave way to jealousy.

"Refused you?" he echoed.

"Right."

"That"—Omar the Red's voice peaked a shrill octave—"that means you—"

Ruffian

Illustrated by John
Richard Flanagan

of The Two
High Tartary

Abdullah

Omar the Red



"Right," said Omar the Black calmly, "again. I made love to her, although, I regret to say, unsuccessfully."

"Allahoo akbar!" the choked cry came from Omar the Red's throat.

His twin brother laughed. "You would have reason for complaint," he pointed out logically enough, "if she had not refused me."

"Oh—"

"Furthermore, at the time I had not the faintest idea that—the Lord alone knoweth why—you were her chosen. Nor, finally, were my intentions serious. The thought of marriage never entered my head."

"The which makes it worse."

"Or—since I planned no lasting tie—better. A matter of viewpoint."

"No, nol A matter," declared Omar the Red virtuously, almost unctuously, "of proper, clean morals. Why,"—and

he grew more and more jealous, more and more angry,—
"when I think of it! A tough, hard-bitten rake like you, and a sweet young girl—"

"Not quite as young as she used to be. Years, remember, have gone by."

Omar the Red paid no heed to the interruption, which he considered frivolous.

"Tell me!" he demanded. "Have you no morals at all? By the Prophet's toe-nails, you—ah—trying to force yourself on her—"

"Did I say so?"

"I know you, O great scoundrel!"

Omar the Black was amused.

"You ought to know me," he replied, "being my twin—in everything. Indeed, I have heard tales about you—and about girls a-plenty, here and there and everywhere. And now—for you to prate about morals! The tomcat—is there

not a proverb;—ate seventeen thousand chickens, then went on pilgrimage to Mecca."

He winked at his brother.

"And as to Ayesha," he went on, "there is no need for you to upset your liver. For there is another woman in my life. Or rather,"—with a sigh, and wiping from his steel-cold eye a tear which had no business there,—“out of my life."

He paused.

"Gothia is her name," he added; and pronouncing her name, he rolled it over his tongue like a sweet.

He stood there, in the bright moonlight, and gesticulated excitedly.

"By all the True Saints, what a girl!" he shouted, his raucous, loud-bellowing accents clashing ludicrously with the sentimental extravagance of his words: "As a garment, she is silver and white! As a season, the spring! As a flower, the Indian jasmine! As a singer, the nightingale! As a perfume, violet blended with heliotrope and sandalwood! As a being, love incarnate! As a—"

"You talk like a drunken poet," Omar the Red commented contemptuously.

"Drunken? No. Poet? Yes. And how can I help being a poet whenever I think of her? Is she not the loveliest creature on the seven hills and the seven steppes?"

Omar the Red sniffed.

"Here," he said, "is a statement which, were I less the courteous gentleman, I would brand as a lie."

"Eh?"

"A most abominable lie—it being a fact, known to all the world, that it is Ayesha who is the loveliest."

"It is not so—by Allah!"

"It is—by Allah and by Allah!"

"Ayesha cannot compare with Gothia. Even a blind man, or a fool, would know that much. *Wah*—would you mention a glittering, glorious peacock in the same breath with a little brown barnyard fowl!"

Omar the Red frowned. "Be careful, brother," he warned, "lest the crimson rage should come upon me."

"Let it come—and I'll souse it in crimson blood."

"*Hai*—dare you bandy words, O louse?" Omar the Red glared ferociously at his twin. "Whoever bandies words with me must bandy swords."

"By my honor—and I bandy both! Heavy words—and a sword as heavy! Sharp words—and a sword as sharp!"

THE next moment, once more bright blades leaped from bright scabbards to the touch of ready fists. And brother would have been murderously at brother, if suddenly Omar the Black had not roared with mirth.

He tossed his weapon aside.

"Death itself," he announced, "could not end this argument. For even after you have reached Paradise, you will still bore Allah and His Prophet and His blessed Angels by maintaining that Ayesha is the loveliest."

"Whereas you, even should the fires of Gehenna claim you for their own, will still annoy Beelzebub by giving the crown to Gothia."

Then laughter blended with laughter. They embraced fondly; and after a while Omar the Red inquired:

"What brought you here like a thief in the night, trying to steal another man's horse?"

"What else is a robber supposed to do, if he has no mount of his own?" came the answering question. "What good is a robber *without* a horse?"

"A robber—you?"

"I am that same."

"But—"

"Is there a reason why you should be the only bandit in the family?"

"Not a bandit."

"No?"

"A—well—a hero of the highways, say. Besides, necessity drove me to it."

Omar the Red spoke as virtuously, as unctuously, as before. To believe him, one might have thought that there had been for him no different way of earning a living.

"But you," he went on, "why—sitting at your ease in the grand castle—"

"Mine no longer."

And then Omar the Black told Omar the Red what had happened to the castle, had happened to himself, in the swing of the passing years.

ACCEPTING his personal version of the tale, he was a man most innocently, most cruelly and grievously pursued by the black hounds of fate, although this was an opinion not shared by many, and most certainly not by the good people of Nadirabad, the small town that nestled in the shadow of the castle.

These people declared that to talk of honey does not make the mouth sweet; that, in other words, for Omar the Black to make himself out a sinless, spotless, stainless victim of Kismet was ridiculous on the face of it. For, they wanted to know, and wanted quite rightly to know, what about how he had behaved after his twin brother had left him in sole possession of his ancestral inheritance?

Had he settled down like a decent citizen? Had he attended to his rich, fertile stretch of fields; his green pastures, up each day with the sun and the little wind of morning, and doing his stanch toil?

No!

Had he put his mind and will to lawful and profitable enterprise?

Again—no!

Had he paid his long-overdue debts to baker and butcher and weaver and wine-merchant?

Once more—no!

On the other hand, had he not looked to strong-thewed violence to help his loose living, assaulting honest tradesmen when they refused him further credit?

Yes!

Had not most of the sleek russet cattle that crowded his corrals crossed a neighbor's fence in the dead of night, muzzled and tail first?

Again—yes!

Had he not filled his house with raffish good-for-nothings, the sweepings of the bazaars and the caravanserais, toppers and gamblers and rogues of a dozen races, even—bless them not the Lord Allah!—unbelieving Christians and Jews? Had he not, when Hajji Iskandar, the green-turbaned priest, had called on him, asking him to give up his evil habits, driven forth the saintly man with blasphemous jeers and taunts? Had he not he and his rascally crew made the countryside unsafe for decent Moslem women—where once this same countryside had been safe for the prettiest maid ever so lonely?

Once more—yes and yes and yes!

And finally—later on, when he had left home, yet the scandalous tale of it had gone round and round the land in a rumor of wind—what about his blackest misdeed: the way he had treated the sister of that great and honorable nobleman, the Grand Khan of the Golden Steppe?

Fathouma was her name; and he met her a number of months after that memorable and violent night when the people of Nadirabad, outraged in their purses, their peace and their pride, had at last reached the end of their patience and had turned on Omar the Black. A night, let us add, when they knew that, with no steel-rattling boon-companions being his guests just then, he was alone in the castle but for little Ayesha and for Mustaffa, the old majordomo. All the other servants had left the household in the course of the rather lean years.

It was Murad, the perfume-merchant, who started the ball rolling. And, in an indirect way, Ayesha.

Earlier in the day Omar the Black had found her weeping as if her heart would break. For news had come,

"It is better," said Omar, "to slip with the foot than with the tongue." He tweaked the merchant's nose and stalked out, taking the attar of rose without bothering to pay.



through Kalmick nomads on their road through the land with a drove of cattle, of Omar the Red, and how splendidly he was faring; wandering up and down the world, rich and glorious and famed, having his pick of women, and roistering with the merry, laughing men of the south. . . .

Omar the Black, like many a tough man before him, had felt helpless in the presence of a girl's tears, had tried clumsily to console her.

"Never mind," he had said. "He is thinking of you, wherever he is—whatever he does."

"Aye,"—unhappily—"thinking of me with ridicule and derision. I wish," she had sobbed, "I wish I were in my grave!"

Omar the Black had felt terribly sorry for her; had thought: "I know what I shall do. I'll go to the bazaar and buy her a little gift."

So he had gone to Murad's shop to bargain there for a bottle of attar of rose—what he called bargaining, with the help of coarse words and coarser fists.

Oh, yes—his fists. Hairy and hard and freckled, moving within a threatening inch of Murad's snub nose. And this same nose—quite naturally, given the man's trade—keen at detecting and classifying delicate scents. And here, on Omar the Black's fingers, he had not smelled, as he should have, leather and tobacco and the stale lees of wines, but—*w'elah! w'elah!*—a certain sweet odor.

He knew it, knew it well.

It was—no doubt of it—rare Indian musk mingled with rarer ambergris. The only perfume of its kind in Nadirabad. Just the other day Murad had bought a vial of the precious liquid from a traveling Turkish merchant, to present it to Aziza, his pretty young wife.

And what—Allah!—what was this odor doing on Omar's rough hands?

He asked a rash question, received an insolent—and hypocritical—reply:

"Listen, O uncouth wart on the belly of creation! Have you so little faith in your wife's honor—not to forget mine own—that you would besmirch her and me with your ignoble suspicions?"

Suspicious, reflected Murad, and swallowed hard, fully justified. But he did not voice them when he saw the dangerous glint in the other's eyes. Instead he salaamed, stammered:

"Forgive me, lord."

"I shall," said Omar, "being of a forgiving nature. But remember for the future—it is better to slip with the foot than with the tongue."

He leaned across the counter. Between thumb and second finger he grabbed the merchant's nose. He tweaked it painfully—the scent of musk and ambergris becoming still more strong—and he stalked out of the shop, taking along the bottle of attar of rose, without bothering to pay for it or to inquire about credit.

Murad stared after him, livid with rage. Then he rushed



The horse jerked into a gallop toward the abyss. But already Omar had leaped. . . . Cruel fingers acted as a brake.

home, where he took a stout stick to his young wife—who took sharp finger-nails to him.

That evening, at a tavern where he and his cronies were in the habit of foregathering, Murad drank his fill of wine—more than his fill: enough, in fact, to give him what is called in the Tartar language Persian courage. This courage was fed, shrewdly and meanly, by the knowledge that tonight Omar the Black was alone in the castle.

Murad mentioned it to his friends; and they exchanged slow, meaning glances. All had suffered, these past years, in purse and peace and pride, from Omar's arrogant conduct. Here, it seemed, was their chance to pay him back.

"Are you sure he is alone?" asked Musa the blacksmith.

"Are you sure?" demanded Hamdi the horse-leech.

"Are you sure?" echoed Ibrahim the butcher.

"Tell me!" queried Hajji Iskandar the priest. "Are you quite, quite sure?"

"I am," Murad coughed. "And so—"

"And so," declared the priest, "it is our manifest duty, as men and Moslems, to prove to Omar the Black that wickedness must ever find condign punishment. Thus it is written in the blessed Koran."

"That is so!" agreed Murad. "Ah,"—thinking of his wife—"are we not of the Tartar race? Why should the like of us eat dirt?"

"Let Omar," exclaimed the butcher, "eat dirt for a change—the right sort of supper for him. And I shall lard it well."

"There's a fidget in my sword-arm," said the blacksmith, flexing his muscles.

"My small gray knife," chimed in the horse-leech, "whinnies to leave its scabbard."

"Allah is with us!" boomed the priest.

"What are we waiting for?"

"Out steel! Up fists! At him!"

They piled out of the tavern. On their way through the town they picked up others, many others—the baker, the tailor, the silk-weaver, and clerks, apprentices, porters. They shouted encouragement to each other:

"To the castle! . . . To the castle, heroes!"

They swept on in a mighty flood. They reached the castle. Stones rattled against the windows and doors; and when Omar the Black appeared on the threshold, sword in hand, the whole valiant lot of them made for him with yells of:

"Defend yourself!"

Which was by way of being a grimly unconscious jest, he being one against the many. And no help at all except Ayesha, and Mustaffa the majordomo—and what help were they, with the latter too old and feeble to do more than pour boiling water from a balcony upon the heads of the attackers, and the former a girl and unable to do aught but throw pots and crockery with indifferent aim.

For a while, though, Omar the Black did well enough, wielding both sword and fist. Wading into the fray, smashing a nose awry here, blackening an eye there, pricking a round posterior or two, as butcher and perfume merchant ran yelling to the rear.

A bully bit of strife; and on that night years later Omar the Black described it to his brother:

"Wah!" he said. "Such a battle it was as I had never yet dreamed of nor hoped for. Not even I, to whom long odds have always been as a draught of cooling, potent wine! Here they were, these uncouth creatures, pitiful, blood-gluttonous, writhen and accursed—and bent upon outrage on my fine clean person. But—*wah, wah!* They receded before my hard onslaught. Right and left they dropped, like cornstalks heavy in the ear before the reaper's scythe. And seven I killed! Seventeen I injured most horribly! Twenty-seven went down, trampled out of all human semblance by the crushing boots of their flying, panic-stricken friends!"

O H, yes, that's how, years later, he described the scene to Omar the Red. The latter, being the other's twin brother, knew him, and for that matter, knew himself well enough to make certain allowances—though the fact remains that Omar the Black fought stanchly, and that his opponents nursed many a wound and bruise.

Still, after a while, numbers told.

They pulled him down as slobbering hounds pull down a stag. And so presently he was given the same choice which, years earlier, he had offered to his brother: to leave the castle, either on his own two feet, or stark and cold in the coffin.

Here was really no choice at all; and it was typical of him, the lawless man, that he should appeal vociferously to the law. He cursed the others roundly. He called them—and did not see the humor of it—scoundrelly bandits and ignoble thieves.

"The castle," he cried, "is mine, mine! What right have you, O wearers of most verminous turbans, to rob me of my inheritance?"

"We do not intend to rob you," said the butcher. "The castle is yours."

"Then?"

"You can return here—after you have paid all your debts."

"And," added the baker, "after you have proved that, in the future, you will live a decent life."

"No longer scandalizing the countryside by making love to our wives and daughters—"

"No longer assaulting peaceful citizens—"

"No longer consorting with toppers and gamblers and such riffraff—"

"And furthermore," suggested the priest, "going to the mosque each Friday hereafter, and prostrating yourself before Allah and the Prophet as a proper Moslem should, and imploring forgiveness for your many sins."

"Yes, yes! I promise!"

"Pah! Promises—*your* promises are lines written on water."

Omar the Black was furious. "You doubt my word?"

"No." The priest smiled thinly. "We accept your word—when it is flanked by good, honest deeds."

Omar the Black was helpless. He shrugged in ungracious resignation. He showed his broad back to the grinning townspeople and spoke to Ayesha, who had come from the house and was watching and listening nervously.

"What about you?" he asked. "What are you going to do?"

"I shall stay here—with your permission. I shall till a small patch of ground—there will be enough food for me—and I shall keep the castle clean and well swept."

"Waiting for my return," he demanded, jesting gently, "or my brother's?"

"Your brother," she sighed, "will never come back. Never, never, never!"

He kissed her.

"And if he does not come back to you of his own free will," he told her, "I shall find him wherever he is—and lead him back to you by the ear."

Then once more, he addressed the townsmen, once more cursed them roundly.

"Beware, sons of dogs!" he shouted. "If my brother had been here, we could have held this castle against the might of all Islam. And—*hai*—sooner or later we shall both return, sturdily, side by side. And on that day there will be a waft of cold air about this place not particularly wholesome for any of your breed."

So Omar the Black went away also. He too took the long road, the far road. Of him, too, there was, in the course of time, wind-blown across High Tartary, a telling of tales. Tales different from those that spoke of his brother, since, due doubtless to his stay-at-home years, he was less brave than Omar the Red, less hardy?

Not at all.

Let us say, rather, that his life, having been more easy than his brother's, had made him more indolent; and that he did not consider it a point of honor to obtain what he was after by violence, if other means would turn the trick.

These means consisted in a certain audacious charm which was his; also, in his knowledge how to show a handsome leg in stepping the measure of a dance, how to pay neat compliments to man and woman, how, on the other hand, to entertain rough men with rough jests—and how to sing the old songs, the songs of feuds, the songs of heroes, the songs which, high up, the eagles echo shrilly when they hear them, and fall to fighting in mid-air with cracking beak and tearing talon. So he was not unwelcome to the peasants, who, tied to the prosy toil of the fields, gave him hospitality on his wanderings through the land—food and drink and a pipe and a bed.

The best they had, though not much, sure enough, for a Tartar gentleman—until, after a while, according to the tales, great luck, white luck came to him.

Not that he himself called it luck. It was, he would explain, no more than a just reward for his bold bravery. Nor was he boasting, since it was his bravery that saved the life of the Grand Khan of the Golden Steppe, and that brought a pleasant turn to Omar's fortune. . . .

The Grand Khan lived above the town of Khokand, in the ancient palace of the Ghilzai Tartar lords that, topping a steep hill with an avalanche of square granite blocks, had been built many centuries earlier by copper-faced freebooters who had swept out of the north and had scarred and conquered the land as far as Balkh and Kandahar with torch and rope and the crackle of steel, and the sardonic, nasal drone of the war-drums.

But Uzbek Haydar, last of the line of feudal rulers, with no near relation but his sister Fathouma, was totally unlike his ancestors.

Good-natured he was, quick at forgiving, easily moved to laughter, fond of a song and a salty jest. He had forgotten the haughty, cruel prowess of his race in the pleasures of the fleshpots, the wine-jugs and the soft silken divans; and there was gossip in the bazaars that it took seven yards of brocade for a shawl to twist about his ample stomach.

Yet the gossip was not meant maliciously.

THERE was, on the contrary, a melting fondness in voice and smile and eye when the Grand Khan's subjects spoke of him. Well-beloved he was by man and woman and child, as his sister Fathouma was well-beloved. And when, twice a year, followed by a glittering retinue of soldiers and courtiers, he rode through his wide domain, he was heartily welcome everywhere. For he was not the one to demand exorbitant taxes—was, indeed, ever ready to dip generous fingers into his purse and to help the deserving—and for that matter, the undeserving.

His land reached as far as the ragged Dourrah Yousseff mountain range. And there one morning he rode into a village shortly after Omar the Black, coming from the opposite direction, had entered the same hamlet.

Omar was on foot. He was dusty and weary; sick of the simple rough life, the simple rough fare; wondering if, like



his brother, he should make his living as a gentleman of the highways, or if—there being rumors of strife north, east, south, west—he should go to Russia or to India and enlist in the army and try a trip to the foreign wars, for the sport and the loot of it.

He had gone to the village inn, where he had quenched his thirst with regretably thin wine; and now he was leaning against the outside of the door, yawning, looking toward the hills, when suddenly he gave a start.

For there came a hollow, thundering tattoo of horses' feet, a clatter of pebbles, a confusion of cries—cries of fear, cries for help—brushing down the road in a staccato symphony.

This road had never been finished. A short distance beyond the inn it turned sharply and ended, leaping into space and tumbling into the bed of the turbulent river a thousand feet below; and toward this abyss, carrying its rider, the Grand Khan of the Golden Steppe, to certain death of broken neck and shattered limbs, galloped a black stallion, completely out of control, its bit between its teeth, followed by a dozen men who, spurring their mounts as they might, were unable to catch up.

The cavalcade swept on. Once the stallion stumbled, almost fell—squatting on its hind-quarters like a dog, slid for a few yards in a sitting posture through loose sand and gravel. Then, before the rider could disentangle his feet from the stirrups and before the others could reach him, once more the horse jerked into a frantic gallop toward the abyss and death.

A fat man was the Grand Khan—ludicrously fat—and a brave man. For even as he passed the inn in a whirlwind of dust and flying hooves, even as Omar the Black ran forward, ready to help, to do what he could, feet well braced on straddled legs, body slightly bent, arms curved like a wrestler's—even at that moment the Grand Khan succeeded in raising a hand in warning, crying:

"No, no!"

But already the other had leaped from the ground and, brain and muscles acting in perfect unison, had caught the crazed animal around the neck. He swung himself up in front of Uzbek Haydar—reached out, inserted strong fingers into the stallion's nostrils.

Double weight and cruel fingers acted like a brake. Less than a foot away from the abyss the horse stopped, snorting, shivering.

Not long later the Grand Khan and Omar the Black were sitting in the inn before a blazing fire. Sitting there over heaped platters and a fine array of bottles round and

square—not the landlord's vinegary tippie, but strong ruby-red wine supplied by Uzbek Haydar's servants.

Like old friends they were, and the Grand Khan was in a gay mood, laughing uproariously, thoroughly enjoying himself. For was not this young Tartar a prince among good fellows, a master of seven times seven glorious, rollicking songs, of seven times seven spiced jests, of seven times seven incredible tales? And a good drinker. A sound trencherman. A man—ah—after his own heart!

He smote Omar on the back.

"How is it with your life," he demanded, "you who have saved mine?"

Then the other told him what had happened in the past. "I have lost my old fortune," he added, "and am looking for a new."

"Why look farther than the end of your nose?"

"Eh—?"

"You have already found your fortune. Come with me to Khokand—and before your fine black beard has sprouted another inch, you shall be a vizier in scarlet and gold." The Grand Khan rose, went to the door. "Ho!" he called to his retinue, "a horse for this Tartar gentleman! He rides my way!"

And so it came about that Omar the Black went to Khokand, that he was appointed chief chamberlain to the Grand Khan, living at the palace in state and ease and luxury, stalking about the handsomely furnished rooms with an air and a swagger, and the lesser dignitaries salaaming to him and currying his favor, and he saying to himself:

"By the honor of my nose! Am I not the grand lad come into his own?"

A FEW months later, Omar the Black met Fathouma, Uzbek Haydar's sister, who had been away from home on a visit to a distant cousin, the Khan of Gulistan, not far from the Persian border.

She was not pretty. Nor was she young—indeed, a year or two older than Omar.

Rather faded she was, and graying the hair that curled over her temples, and a network of thin, crinkly lines at the corners of her brown gold-flecked eyes. But—oh, the tenderness in those same eyes; the sweetness, the simplicity, the depth of feeling; the decency and generosity—like a mirroring, people said, of the decency and generosity in her heart.

Her heart had often been touched by friendship, never by love, although in the days of her youth, when her locks had been auburn and her complexion like rose petals, many a great noble had asked her hand in marriage.

Perhaps, she had wondered, had sighed a little, love would never come her way?

And now, daily, she saw Omar the Black; daily listened to his songs, his impudent wit, his rollicking tales. She liked him so much. Belike—and she would blush—more than merely liked?

Allah, she would think, what a fine-looking man he was! With his silken raven-black beard, *still* quite black, although helped along here and there with a drop of gall-nut dye; his sturdy body clapped into resplendent clothes, with elegant breeches of grass-green Bokharan satin fully pleated and cunningly embroidered, and jeweled buttons on the short tunic; a necklace of square-cut emeralds—the Grand Khan's gift—about his throat; and a voluminous, snow-white turban cocked over one ear!

Perhaps he was not quite as whip-lean as he used to be, the feeding at the palace being high. But then, Fathouma did not mind. She preferred hearty men with a proper, honest ampleness about their middle, to scarecrows whose bones rattled in their skin.

It will always be a mooted point if she kissed him first, or he her.

But late one evening, crossing the rose garden in back of the palace, the Grand Khan saw them in each other's

arms. They did not see him; and, discreet man, he stepped into the shelter of a chestnut tree, watching, listening—and smiling. For he was fond of his sister, fond of Omar the Black. . . .

"Do you love me, Omar?" he heard her say. "Really—really?"

"Do not my lips say so?"

"But your heart—how can I read its secret?"

"You can read it wherever you are, wherever you go! Ah,"—for Omar the Black was like his twin brother, proud of his fine eloquence, reveling in it, at times carried away by it, and at other times, later on when sober reflection came to him, wishing he had not said a word—"you can read my heart's secret in the nightingale's cry, in the blowing of the south wind and the throbbing winglike call of all the unborn children of the world!"

He smiled.

By the Prophet the Adored, he thought, he had expressed himself well! And on the spur of the moment!

HIS smile widened. He looked at Fathouma with pleasure. Her blushing, maidenly confusion became her, gave a touch of color and youth to her faded cheeks.

"Your words," she whispered, "are music. "Only—do you mean it?"

"I do."

"You—tell me—you have loved before?"

"Yes."

"Oh—"

"Would you have me else? Would you have me a beardless stammering lad, afraid of his own passion?"

"No, no. But—how can I be sure of you—forever?"

"Let me explain to you how it is with me." Again he was carried away by his own eloquence, again piled phrase on florid phrase. "In the past, it was always with me the way my fancy went—went one way or the other. And there would be times when my fancy wandered alone; and times when it sought a fine, brawling company of merry, brisk, hard-drinking men; and times when it would dance up and down the road, with a woman's subtle narrow feet echoing alongside. But," he lowered his voice, and deep inside of him he was a little ashamed, knew that he should not say it, yet could not help himself,—“it is now the final way my fancy has gone, straight to your soul, O jewel among women! To the fresh sweet wilderness there, and the birds in it chiming and warbling, and the sun above it,”—he pointed at the darkening sky, quite forgetting that it was evening, with the moon already rising—“shining so polished and hearty!"

Once more he kissed her lips—soft lips, he thought, and was amazed. And the next second, the Grand Khan jumped out from behind the chestnut tree.

"Congratulations!" he shouted. "Congratulations! May the Lord bless you both!"

He embraced his sister, embraced Omar the Black.

"*Hai-yai-yai!*" he exclaimed, "it will be the handsomest wedding ever seen in High Tartary!"

Omar the Black turned pale. Wedding?

Why—by the red pig's bristles, no such notion had entered his mind!

He was about to say so. "Listen—" he began.

But quickly he reconsidered, was silent. For the Grand Khan was old—oh, yes—and kindly and gentle and mild and forgiving. Still, he *was* Grand Khan; and there were certain insults not even he would be willing to forgive. An insult, for instance, to his sister. A man jilting her!

In such a case, there would be no doubt of it—the malefactor's head chopped off presently, and stuck above the palace gate, as a warning to other rash men who might feel inclined to blacken Uzbek Haydar's escutcheon, as an amusement to the righteous, and as food for the vultures and carrion-crows.

So Omar the Black salaamed.

"I—to marry your sister, Khan?" he said. "No, no! The honor would be too great."

The Grand Khan slapped him on the back.

"No honor," he replied, "is too great for you, Tartar."

Therefore, on a night a few weeks later, in a marble pavilion on the palace grounds, the bride-to-be awaited the coming of the bridegroom-to-be.

She was alone. She was sitting cross-legged on a low, broad divan. She was veiled from head to foot. Beneath the veil, after the Tartar fashion, her face was painted and powdered in stark red and white. Precious jewels were about her throat and encircled her wrists and ankles. Her finger- and toenails were stained crimson with henna. So were her heels and the palms of her hands.

Her eyes were shining with happiness, as from a distance she heard throaty yells: "Yoo-yoo-yoo! Yoo-yoo-yoo-yoo!"

The immemorial ululation—high-pitched, reverberating—of all Islam, either in great joy or great grief.

"Yoo-yoo-yoo! Yoo-yoo-yoo-yoo!"

Dear Lord, she thought, her life's happiness coming nearer and nearer.

She looked through the window. She saw a glaring of torches, blending into a golden sea—the marriage procession.

A long procession! Omar the Black, most gorgeously arrayed and astride a blue-mottled Kabuli stallion. The priest, white-bearded, green-turbaned, reciting appropriate verses from the Koran. The Grand Khan, smiling at his subjects, who smiled back at him. Young men waving lanterns and tall poles decked with flowers and ribbons. Others carrying torches that flamed red and gold. Still others tossing fireworks high into the air or strewing flowers. Small boys running up and down and sprinkling Omar with rosewater. Musicians bringing up the rear with a din of flutes and reed-pipes and cymbals and tamborines.

The *Kisslar Agassi*—the chief eunuch of the palace—raising his arms like a cheer-leader.

"A long life to the bridegroom!" he shouted. "Cry Yoo-yoo-yoo, O Moslems!"

"A long life to the bridegroom! Yoo-yoo-yoo!"

"And to the bride!"

"Yoo-yoo-yoo! Yoo-yoo-yoo-yoo!"

"Yoo-yoo-yoo!" the priest himself, forgetting his sacerdotal dignity, echoed deep in his throat.

"Yoo-yoo-yoo!" exclaimed the Grand Khan.

"Yoo-yoo-yoo-yoo-yoo!" exclaimed the women from behind their screened balconies, or rushing into the street, pressing sweetmeats and bouquets into Omar's hands, and showering benedictions upon him.

"Ten thousand years of happiness, O Moslem!"

"Ten thousand times ten thousand years!"

"A lucky lad, this Tartar! Throw him into the river—and he will rise with a fish in his mouth!"

Laughter then. The unrestrained, raucous, bellowing laughter of Asia.

"Yoo-yoo-yoo! May she bear you as many stout men-children as there are hairs in your beard!"

"What sayeth the Koran? 'Forgive your wife seventeen times a day!'"

More laughter. More shouts: "Yoo-yoo-yoo!"

Ban-n-ng went the crackers. *Swish* went the rockets. *Swizz* went the squibs. The streets and bazaars of Khokand rushed with flickering lights, scarlet-hearted, blue-tipped, yellow-frayed.

THE wedding procession filed around the corner, up to the palace, the torches melting into the purple of the night, their sparks of red and gold and green softened to a running play of rainbow colors, then dying altogether with just a single high-light still glistening, like the blood gleam at the core of a black opal.

"Yoo-yoo-yoo! Yoo-yoo-yoo-yoo—" Very faintly, from far off; a mere memory of sound, as the procession returned as it had come—while Omar the Black entered the pavilion.

He crossed the outer room, opened the door of the inner room and closed it, leaning against the jamb. He did not advance, but stood there, looking at Fathouma.

And then, quite suddenly—and perhaps she read the whole story in the frowning crinkle across his forehead and the thin twitch of his lips—a great knowledge came to her, and a great bitterness.

Yet not bitterness enough to take away one least tittle of her generosity, her decency. She rose.

"I," she began. . . . "Oh,"—her voice broke a little—"I understand—"

He gave a start. "What?" he asked.

"Yourself—and myself."

"But—"

She pointed to the back door. "Go!" she told him. "Go at once—through the garden—past the servants' quarters—lest my brother should find out and—"

She swallowed hard, was silent.

So was he. He stared at her. Then he said: "Listen—" "No, no, no! Why should I listen? What is there to say?"

He dropped on his knees before her.

"Merely that you are great—Allah!—so great of heart. . . ."

"But,"—with that same bitterness,—"not lovely of face, nor young, nor—"

A storm of sobs shook her. But she pulled herself together. She took Omar by both shoulders and pushed him toward the back door. She spoke with proud dignity:

"I am what I am. I am of the Ghilzai Tartar lords. The tree is not more old than we, nor yet the mountains, nor yet the steppe, nor yet the sky. Thus why should I mate with the like of you, a mere ruffian?"

There was another silence. "Ah," she continued, and once more her voice broke a little, "go away! Go—quickly, quickly—O beloved ruffian! And oh, be careful!"

SO Omar the Black took the back way out of the pavilion, out of the palace grounds. Oh, yes, he thought, better be careful! He had enemies at court, naturally, since he, the stranger, had become the Grand Khan's favorite. Esa the chief eunuch was his worst enemy—frequently, and grossly, he had insulted the latter.

He helped himself to the first horse he saw tied to a gate, was off at a gallop through Khokand's coiling streets, and left town. The next morning Fathouma spoke to her brother, as she had to Omar:

"I am what I am. Thus why should I mate with the like of him, a mere ruffian?"

Maybe Uzbek Haydar believed her. Maybe he did not. But it is certain that the people of Khokand did not believe at all, that presently there was gossip swapped in coffee-house and opium-den, in mosque and caravanserai:

"Wah—how can such things be?"

"It is marriage with another man the Princess Fathouma will be thinking of now."

"But who will take her to wife?"

"Not I—with her name besmirched!"

"I pity her."

"I pity her brother more."

"I wonder why Omar left her—on her wedding-night."

"Yes. I wonder—"

It was Esa the chief eunuch who mentioned the gossip to Uzbek Haydar, explaining—with hypocritical self-righteousness—that he considered it his duty.

"Send swift horsemen after him," he suggested. "Have him brought back and punished."

"Be quiet!" shouted the Grand Khan. He clenched his fists. "I," he exclaimed, very much much as his sister had done, "am of the Ghilzai Tartar lords! I am old—yes, and I am fat. But I am still, and always, of the Ghilzai Tartar lords. Still, and always, Grand Khan of the Golden Steppe. If sorrow must happen to me, let it happen with banners and steel and the roll of drums—not with the twisting of unclean, whispered words!"

He smote the eunuch heavily across the face; and thereafter there was little scandal talked in Khokand. But the tale, as we mentioned, went round and round High Tartary in a rumor of wind. It reached Nadirabad, the small town that nestled in the shadow of the old castle where Omar the Red and Omar the Black had been born. And there indignant comment was heard:

"Ah—the black, black misdeed!"

"As black as his beard!"

"He should be ashamed of himself!"

If he was, he did not let on.

Indeed, on that night when, after the many years, he had again met his brother, he said to the latter:

"Life at the palace, I admit, was pleasant. Rich food, potent wines, silken easy and luxury. Still, I did not mind taking to the road. For my muscles were becoming flabby, my stomach as round as an Armenian's purse. I was choking for want of air—clean fresh air. So I was glad to get away from there, glad to feel and taste and smell freedom once more—the happiness of freedom."

Then he sighed.

"And yet," he added, "I am not happy—now. For whenever I think of Gothia—"

Omar the Red was astonished.

"Did you not tell me," he demanded, "that her name is Fathouma?"

"I," replied Omar the Black, without the slightest embarrassment, "am speaking of another girl—ah, the loveliest in all the world!"

And he told his twin brother how he had met this other girl, quite a while after he had left Khokand. . . .

He drew a veil less of discretion than of falsity over what had happened to him in the course of time, after he had ridden out of Khokand; did not divulge by what methods he had earned a living.

Instead he announced:

"Your cattle-lifting, your purse-snatching, your levying wayside toll from peasant and peddler and caravaneer, your pretty fly-by-night knaveries? No, no, no! Not for me! I, by Allah, follow the white road of honor. I play the hero's game, the clanking, shimmering sword game. I put emperors upon their thrones. I punish rebel subjects. I establish peace between kingdom and kingdom. By my stout help great chieftains reign more securely, and their daughters' dowries are made richer. And proud though I am, I am not too proud to accept suitable reward—be it gold or silver or charming, jeweled trinket."

Omar the Red winked at his brother.

"And yet," he suggested, "tonight you tried to steal my horse, told me you were a robber—"

"I wish,"—severely,—"you would not interrupt. I was coming to that. Let me repeat that I follow the white road of honor. Or at least, I did formerly—before fate stabbed me in the back."

So he declared—and he lied abominably and without blushing.

HE went on to relate how, thanks to a chain of unfortunate circumstances—"not my own fault, I give most solemn oath!"—he had found himself one afternoon on foot, ragged and hungry and without a stiver in his waist-shawl. Hour after hot dusty hour he trudged along, weary and dispirited; came at last to Gulabad, the capital city of Gulistan—and later on, he was to recall, unpleasantly, that here, in this khanate, ruled Fathouma's distant cousin, whom she had visited a few months earlier.

Omar the Black was not at his best. Every one of his muscles ached; his throat was dry; he felt a sharp rheumatic twinge down his left leg; and glancing into a mirror that topped a bazaar display, he decided that his beard was sadly in need of a touch or two of gall-nut dye.

"Not," he told himself defiantly, "that I am getting old! No, no! Why, I'm twenty at the heart! And the heart—that's what counts."



"Congratulations!" he shouted. . . . "It will be the handsomest wedding ever seen in High Tartary."

So, in spite of the pain in his leg, though wincing a little, he went swinging along with a wide bold step, giving way to nobody, his feet firm on the ground, his torn, mud-stained cloak tossing from side to side.

He looked about him. Never before had he been in Gulabad. But he liked it at once. It was a place, he reflected, and he had a nose for that sort of thing, where a man might find his fill of varied and profitable adventures.

Splendid palaces here, clawing at the sky with the horn-like peaks of their towers and turrets. Flaunting, scented gardens. Busy caravanserais. Winding, sinuous alleys—as winding and sinuous, he thought, as a widow's passion. A spider's web of mazed, tangled bazaars where the rays of the dying sun flickered an ever shifting shadow-play on jewels and rugs, on copper pots and saddlery and stiff brocades.

A noisy, crowded, full-blooded town. People shouting, jesting, arguing, laughing, haggling. And then the tumult suddenly stilled when, from the minaret of a mosque, there drifted the melodious chant of a *muezzin* calling the faithful to evening prayer:

"*Hie ye to devotion! Hie ye to Salvation! God is most great—*"

On and on droned the chant, while from balcony and shop, from palace and hovel, chimed in the multitude's answering, pious mutter:

"God is most great indeed."

"He is the One God—and Mohammed is the Messenger of God."

"Here I am at Thy call, O Allah."

"Here I am at Thy call—"

"Here," was Omar the Black's silent comment, "am not I at Thy call. For there is a more clamorous and growling call in this shriveled belly of mine."

Indeed he was ravenous. His stomach was as empty as his purse; yet he was not discouraged—having a notion, today as always, where his next meal would be coming from. And he reflected:

"Money or no money, here is my sword, and here my small dagger—than which two, except for my shrewdness and handsome mien, I have no better friend on earth."

Again he looked about, approvingly.

Wealth was everywhere. Wealth clanked in men's waist-shawls. Wealth tinkled on women's bracelets and anklets. Wealth was heaped in bazaar stalls. Wealth, fat and golden and many-faceted, gleamed on a jeweler's wide counter. Omar's nostrils sniffed sensuously, greedily. His fingers itched. Should he help himself right here and now and make a run for it?

He shook his head. Too dangerous, he decided, with the crowd everywhere, and the bright clustering lights, and here and there crimson-turbaned policemen stalking about. Better mark the place, for later on. . . .

He stopped a passer-by. "Forgive me, Moslem," he said politely. "I am new-come to Gulabad. What is this street?"

"The Street of the Western Traders."

"And,"—pointing,—"*this elegant shop?*"

"It belongs to Baruch ben Isaac ben Ezechiel, the rich Jew."

Omar smiled wolfishly. "I have an idea," he thought, "that Baruch ben Isaac ben Ezechiel will be less rich to-night."

Late tonight. And he hoped it would be cloudy and moonless.

He walked on. Turning the corner, he bumped into a tall, burly man—a Turkoman by sign of rawhide boots and immense shaggy fur bonnet pulled deep over the forehead—who was swinging along with a heavy swagger that rivaled Omar's own.

Turkoman and Tartar stared at each other.

"Ho!" exclaimed the Turkoman.

"Hal!" shouted the Tartar.

They kept on staring—and a moment later swapped words discourteous and challenging:

"Beware, O creature! I am the pride of High Tartary's strong, rollicking lads!"

"Pah—a lion is not afraid of fishes!"

"Wah—seller of pig's tripe!"

"Wah, wah—brother of seventeen naughty sisters! Your mother had no nose!"

Omar reached for his hip, where his sword rode.

"Would you vie with me in courage?" he inquired threateningly.

"By the Koran, I was the fine, brisk hero before they weaned you, my pranking boy!"

BY this time, seeing the beginning of a promising row, men and women had crowded in from everywhere. They formed an eager circle; were already taking sides and betting on the outcome.

"Ten pieces of silver on the Turkoman!"

"Fifteen on the ragged Tartar!"

"What are you waiting for?" shrieked a wizen old crone. "Wade in, lads! Wade in! Ah—but you are mighty slow about a small fight!"

"A very small fight, O mother of a thousand past charms," Omar the Black assured her. "It will be all over—but for the winding-sheet, the digging of the grave and the burial rites—in less than a second."

He dropped his torn cloak, rolled up his shirt-sleeves, took off his great turban. At the same instant the Turkoman removed his fur bonnet. And still at the same instant, suddenly, with headgear no longer shadowing their features, they recognized each other; knew that they were friends and not enemies.

"As the Lord liveth," cried the Turkoman, "it is you, Omar the Black!"

"As the Lord liveth, it is you, Timur Bek!" yelled the Tartar.

For often in former years the other had been Omar's guest at the ancestral castle; one of the roistering toppers and gamblers to whom the people back home had so thoroughly objected.

"All hail, comrade!"

"All hail, soul of my soul!"

"All hail, blood of my liver!"

Laughter then in a deep, rumbling basso, and: "Come to my breast, O son of the world!" And it was pretty to see two lusty, well-fleshed men embracing each other, squeezing like wrestlers, swaying to and fro like trees in a meeting of winds, laying whiskered cheek delicately against whiskered cheek, blowing loud-smacking kisses into the air with the tips of their fingers.

"My house," invited Timur Bek, "is not far from here. Let us go there and moisten our gullets with honeyed Persian wine."

"Some other time."

"Why not now?"

"Because it is getting late—and before long I must be off to the shop of Baruch ben Isaac ben Ezechiel."

"To buy or to sell?"

"Neither."

"Eh?"

"To acquire"—Omar coughed—"certain jewels I saw. Glorious rubies, as crimson as my passion. Great emeralds, as green as my jealousy—"

"And, I suppose," interrupted Timur Bek, "a splendid topaz or two, as yellow as Baruch's bile. When—"

"Yes."

The Turkoman smiled.

"Neither Jew nor jewel," he said, "will run away. But my sound wine might, given my servants' rascally, bibbing habits. Come with me, little drinker!"

Not many minutes later the two were sitting on the flat roof-top of Timur Bek's house—higher than the sea of roofs which tossed about it; higher even than the rambling old palace, right next to it, where Yengi Mehmet, the khan of Gulistan, resided.

Swapping memories of former days, and tall, stirring tales they were; quaffing deeply; and after a while, the Turkoman making a noise in his throat that was half sigh and half hiccup, and complaining how shabbily fate had treated him of late.

"Poor! Ah—I am so poor!"

"But"—Omar the Black was highly astonished—"this fine house—"

"Mortgaged to the hilt."

"I see. As my castle is mortgaged?"

"Yes."

The wine, Timur Bek went on to explain, had been obtained on credit. So had the food. The servants were unpaid. He had sold all his horses, except a brace of mares so spavined and rickety that even a blind man would not buy them; had sold, too, all his women slaves.

Again he sighed. There had been, he related, chiefly one slave—

"None lovelier than she," he exclaimed, "in the blue day and the purple night!"

She was a Circassian. It appeared that some months earlier, when he had been rich, he had won her in a game of dice from a traveling Arab merchant; had meant to give her her freedom and make her his wife. For he loved her.

And now—

"You sold her?"

"No."

"Then?"

"I borrowed a large sum, thirty thousand *tomans*, from the Khan of Gulistan, pledging the girl as security. And the Khan is miserly—like an Armenian, you might say, sired by a Greek. The sort who tries to strip two hides off one cow. And if I cannot pay, a few months from today, when the loan is due—" He cursed violently. "By the Prophet, when I think of it—that sweet, lovely girl—in the harem of that—that flea-pasture, that misbegotten jackal-spawn, that eater of filth—"

RAGE choked him. He was silent—leaned forward, put a hand on the Tartar's knee.

"Would you lend me the money?" he begged.

"How can I? I am as poor as you are."

"You will not be poor after you have—ah—acquired rubies and emeralds and—"

"Is there a reason," was the logical question, "why you yourself should not acquire these jewels—or others like them?"

"A good reason."

"Namely?"

"I am well known in Gulabad. The police and magistrates—the Lord alone knoweth why—look upon me with a wary and jaundiced eye. They watch me wherever I go. You, on the other hand, are a stranger whom they don't know well—yet." He paused. "Therefore, will you—"

"No!"

"But—are we not friends?"

"The best in the world. And just because we are, I must refuse. For a wise man once told me that money, loaned for the sake of friendship, spoils this same friendship. And I"—nor did his face redden—"value ours too highly to risk it."

He rose, added that he must be on his way. But the other stopped him.

"Wait! One more bottle—"

Timur Bek went down the stairs, while Omar the Black leaned back on the heaped pillows.

The wine had been good and plentiful, the food fat and well spiced. He was happy, at peace with the world. Why, was he not strong and ardent, in spite of the rheumatic pain in his left leg, the few gray hairs in his beard? And would there not be, before the mouth of morning, the Jew's rubies and emeralds clanking a merry tune in his breeches?

AH, blessed be the ninety-nine names of Allah the One, the Just, the Wise, the Merciful, the Dispenser of Rewards to the Meritorious!

Contentedly he closed his eyes, then opened them again and listened as, from not far off, came the tinkling of a guitar and a woman's voice softly singing a love-song:

"Come tonight, O my beloved!

Come, and hasten!

I shall give you the flower of my red lips

And the jungle of my rich, dark locks.

Come tonight, tonight!

Come, and hasten!

The voice quivered, rose higher and higher to a clear, bell-like note; rested there trembling like a butterfly on a leaf; dropped a full octave:

"Come tonight, O my beloved!

Come, and hasten—"

Omar the Black jumped up.

"Here I come, hurrying as fast as I can!" he cried—and rushed over to the parapet and beheld, on the roof of the Khan's palace, a young girl, unveiled, guitar in hand.

Ah, how sweet she was, the very maiden for himself!

And he leaned impetuously over the balustrade. He whispered:

"What is your name, O madness of the moon?"

She looked up, startled. She saw above her a ruddy, rugged face with eyes that were small and hot and greenish, a long nose that seemed to sneer defiance at the world, a fine forked beard as black as an angry thundercloud.

"I," she stammered, "I am Gothia."

"And why, O Gothia," he inquired, "should you be down there and I up here, when by rights we should be side by side, like two birds billing and cooing on the same perch?"

Then she smiled. "A bird," she said, "with a beard!"

"A most manly bird."

"Yet a bird strange to me. And strange birds are apt to fight, to peck at each other."

"Strange," he demanded, "you and I? How can you say such a thing? Besides, if strange we are, we shall not be so for long—by my honor!"

He leaned still farther over the parapet. Almost he fell. He called her a number of endearing names. "Sweet chick," he called her, and "curds and cream," and "small, cuddling girl." And she laughed gayly.

"You like me?" she demanded.

"I love you!" was his prompt rejoinder. "And what have you to say to that?"

"That you do not lack boldness."

"I have always carried myself with a good chest, as the saying goes, and—"

"Oh—" The girl's cry of fear interrupted him as, up the stairs that led from the inside of the Khan's palace drifted angry, high-pitched words:

"For shame, Gothia! For shame, O wicked, wicked child! To be talking, unveiled, to a stranger! Like a painted hussy of the bazaars!"

Rapidly she turned, ran down the steps and disappeared, while Omar the Black laughed—was still laughing, when a

few moments later Timur Bek returned, a wine-flagon tucked under each arm.

"What is the matter?" asked the Turkoman.

"I am happy. You see—I met a girl. And what a girl!"

"Met a girl?" was the Turkoman's astonished query. "Where?"

"There!" Omar pointed at the palace roof. "A girl whom I love—and who, it appears, loves me. Love!" he shouted—and the sound of the word was to him as a trumpet-call to a battle-steed. "Warm love! Golden love! Ah,"—his imagination taking wings—"for the sake of her love, she swore upon the Koran, she would defy fate itself. Nor,"—calmly,— "can I greatly blame her. For, as she told me, it is the fine tall inches of me that bring the fever of longing to a maid's heart—and my eagle's beak of a nose, my black beard, my courage, my fire, my trenchant way with all and sundry."

He drew himself up. "Ho," he announced exultantly. "But there will be grand kissing and cozening the next time I see Gothia!"

The other gave a start, then demanded: "You said Gothia?"

"Such is her sweet name. As sweet as peaches and honey." He made a clucking noise with his tongue, did not notice that Timur's eyes were narrowing into slits. "Who is she? Do you know?"

"One of the Khan's slaves."

"Not much longer to be his slave. I shall go to the Khan tonight—now, this very instant. I shall say to him: 'I desire this girl—I love her, and she loves me. So, between gentleman and gentleman—'"

"Beware!" came the Turkoman's warning.

"Of what?"

"Of Yengi Mehmet, the Khan. His temper is short and his gallows tall."

OMAR THE BLACK sobered. The girl had stirred him mightily. He stood there unhappy, brooding, his head bent on his chest; then he heard the Turkoman quoting a hoary old proverb:

"The Lord Allah does not close one door without opening another."

"Where is this second door?"

"In your purse."

"Which is empty."

"Did you not mention certain rubies and emeralds?"

"Why,"—Omar's optimism returned,— "of course."

"Sell them—and buy the girl."

"You think the Khan will—"

"His greed may outweigh his temper, though he may demand a high price."

"No price is too high for my love." The Tartar looked up at the sky. The moon had vanished behind clouds.

"Time for me to be off and attend to the jewels. And then, tomorrow morning, I shall call on Yengi Mehmet, and—"

"Wait!"

"Yes?"

"Yengi Mehmet, greedy or not, is thin-skinned. To offer to buy one of his slaves? A most delicate matter that must be tactfully handled."

"I am famed for my tact throughout High Tartary."

"Doubtless. Still, courtesy demands that somebody else should broach this ticklish subject to the Khan. If,"—the Turkoman hid a smile—"you would like to avail yourself of my services as intermediary—"

"By the Horns of the Archangel Gabriel!" interrupted Omar. "You are a friend indeed!"

"A better friend to you than you are to me."

"No, no, my darling. Why, if, later on, I can be of help to you about your own girl—"

"You will," said Timur Bek.

Again he smiled to himself, while the other left the house and hurried off through the night that was wrapping the alleys and bazaars in a cloak of purple shadows.

On the following morning Baruch ben Isaac ben Ezechiel had a stirring tale to tell.

It appeared that, busy at a later hour than was his wont, since he had a necklace to finish for one of the Khan's wives, with a single small light burning above his workbench, he was suddenly surprised by the entrance of nineteen Tartar ruffians. All tall, he described them, all black-bearded, all armed to the teeth, and all violent.

He went on to relate that he fought most valiantly. But by the God of Abraham and of Jacob, what chance had he, being one against the many? They overpowered him, tied and gagged him, robbed him of the pick of his fine jewels. "Though," he declared, "I battled heroically to the last, giving them blow for blow."

THE truth of the matter was different. Less romantic, it was, and more sardonic. Omar the Black had reached the Street of the Western Traders. It was deserted. He approached Baruch's shop. There was a heavy padlock guarding the entrance.

Well—he knew a trick of using the blade of his dagger to snap it open. . . . Then, just as he was about to do so, he noticed a faint glimmer. He peered through a hole in the wooden shutter; saw the jeweler at his bench.

He grinned, knocked on the door.

A silence. Again he knocked—heard shuffling feet and a nervous question:

"Who is it?"

"Let me in!"

"But who—"

"In the name of the Khan's Majesty!"

Here were words uttered on the spur of the moment. And they had an excellent result—excellent, at least, as Omar the Black figured it, since Baruch imagined that it must be a message from the Khan about the necklace which he was fashioning.

So he opened the door—and gave a choked cry of apprehension as he beheld, not one of the palace servants, but a ragged Tartar.

Baruch's cry thinned to a reedy whimper as the stranger took him by the throat and said:

"Be quiet! For my companion does not like rudely raised voices."

Omar entered, pulling the door shut behind him; and the other stammered:

"What companion?"

"Here he is," replied the Tartar. "The brave gray lad—is he not slender! 'Tickle-the-Rib' is his name, and his father's name was 'Slit-the-Gullet.'" With a movement of his left haunch he brought his sword to view, tucked below his torn cloak. "That's he," he added, "as sober as a priest—though sharp in the tongue when roiled."

"But—oh, what do you want?"

"I, personally, want nothing. But my companion,"—tapping his sword,—"*desires credit.*"

"C-c-credit?"

"For jewels which he wishes to purchase. These will do very nicely."

He scooped a handful of emeralds and rubies from the workbench. Then, as the merchant was about to shout for help, he drove a heavy fist against the man's jaw, stretching him unconscious. He tied and gagged him and ran out of the shop, with the loot clanking pleasantly in his breeches.

He smiled. "Ah," he thought, "Allah is Great!"

He went away from the Street of the Western Traders and turned toward Timur Bek's house.

He had, he reflected, more than enough jewels. He would give Timur Bek a fair share of the proceeds, so that the latter could repay what he owed the Khan and get back the little slave-girl whom he had given as security for the loan.

"Ah,"—again—"Allah is Great! All-Just He is, and All-Merciful!"

He rounded the corner—stopped, as from a distance came sounds—human voices and the neighing of horses, the ill-natured grunting of camels.

A caravan? Late hour for a caravan. The city gates were closed at sundown. He wondered. So did others—men and women who ran from their houses, sleepy, yawning, but excited, asking questions. What could it be?

A few moments later, they knew, as brightly lit by a dozen torches carried on tall poles, the caravan came into sight, winding its way through the narrow street.

It was not a trading caravan, Persian or Armenian or Russian, but doubtless one that brought some great dignity to town. For there was a company of soldiers, marching with martial precision. There were half a hundred servants, some on foot and some on horseback. There was, slung between two camels, a *takht-rawan*, a litter, a most gorgeous scarlet-and-gold affair, its silk curtains tightly closed. There was, riding ahead of the cavalcade, a tall, very obese man who wielded a long brass-tipped staff with which he belabored the good people of Gulabad who lined the sidewalks.

"Give way!" he shouted. "Give way!"

Thwack, thwack, went the staff. Louder and more insolent rose the man's shouts.

"Give way! Here cometh one of the lordly Tartar race, the Heaven-Born! Give way! Ah—give way, unmentionable and ignoble ones!"

He leaned from the saddle.

"O your right!" he yelled, bringing down the staff. "O your left! O your buttock! O your belly! O your foot!" suiting his swing to whatever part of Central Asian anatomy he was striking. "O your back, your back, your back! Give way, O creatures!"

The people did not mind. Pomp and violence—was their Oriental philosophy—ever went hand in hand. They gave way—all but Omar the Black.

The brass-tipped staff had flicked across his rheumatic shinbone. It made him furious.

"Give way? I?" he bellowed. "In the name of ten thousand first-class devils, give way yourself, O ill-begotten and especially illegitimate hyena!"

He swaggered forward, straight into the path of the rider, seizing the horse by the rein. And then, as the servants pressed in to push him aside, as the torches flared high, illuminating the scene, he recognized the horseman—who recognized him.

ESA, he was, the chief eunuch of the Grand Khan of the Golden Steppe—and suddenly Omar remembered that the Khan of Gulistan was cousin to the Grand Khan, and cousin, by the same token, to Fathouma, the woman whom he had left on their wedding-night. . . .

Decidedly, this town was not healthy for him!

So he turned on his heel. He cleared a path with kicking feet and crashing elbows. He ran away—just in time.

For here was Esa putting spurs to his mount, shouting to the servants and onlookers:

"Stop him! Stop him! A hundred pieces of gold to the man who stops him!"

Omar the Black hurried on and on; and the last thing he saw, glancing over his shoulder, was the curtain of the litter being pulled aside—and a face looking out. A face faded and sweet and—yes, smiling a little as Omar's long sword caught between his legs and sent him sprawling in the mud—as he picked himself up and ran—faster and faster and faster.

"Their Own Dear Land," the third novelette in this trilogy, will appear in an early issue.

JUST the other day a letter came to me from Australia, which, as these words are written, is under threat of Japanese invasion. It was from an old couple, now in their eighties. Although never very rich, they had been in comfortable circumstances all their lives, with the amenities of a convenient home, and no material worries; and they expected to spend what years were left to them in the same way. But when their letter was sent they had been evacuated from an era of danger to a small and crowded up-country town. There they were living cut off from their friends, in the cramped quarters of a single room. It must be pretty hard on them. Yet the letter breathes not a hint of complaint. On the contrary, it reads almost like a song of triumph. And its theme is *learning*. They have made a great discovery, which is not a bad performance at their age. And that discovery is—themselves. They have, to their amazement, found excellences in one another of which they had never been clearly aware in all their years together. And in each of them unsuspected strength had been revealed. They exclaim over how little material conveniences—on which they had always set considerable store—really seem to matter, and how clearly one comes to distinguish what is important from what is not. . . .

A commonplace tale in days like these, when far more dreadful and dramatic things are happening to millions of people? No doubt! But perhaps it comes home to us all the more forcefully for that very reason. These two are demonstrating in a way we can all understand that constructive living is possible in war time, and that it depends upon a definite and achievable point of view.

As I read the letter I am reminded of a statement recently made by one of our best and most thoughtful radio commentators. He said that for ordinary men and women—that is, for the vast majority of us, including my two old friends—this war is sheer undiluted disaster with no good in it at all, and that anyone who claims the contrary is either a hypocrite or a fool. He is a person for whom I have the most lively respect. His language is quite strong enough to make anybody hesitate about disagreeing with him. As one surveys the stormy scene one cannot deny that he seems to have a case. Perhaps his attitude is the only honest one! But . . . Well, he is in the prime of life, earning a thousand dollars a week, as I happen to know, and living in great comfort in a very safe place. And I re-read my Australian letter. And I think he just doesn't know what he's talking about. Two people, infirm and old, strictly

A Personal Philosophy for War Time*

"To be an American," writes James Mursell, "is to share in a great ideal . . . to be a comrade in a great company."

by JAMES L. MURSELL

up against it, but meeting everything with higher hearts and a more gallant faith than they had ever before achieved, make his words sound like folly. These people are proving, not in words but in action, that constructive values can be gotten out of this war.

Take a straight look at the things we are facing, and try to estimate what they add up to, and what we ought to make of them all. We are entering a tremendous cycle of new experiences, most of them dismaying. On the debit side there is the disruption of our civilian lives, the obliteration of our jobs, the frustration of our careers, the diminution of our incomes, the vanishing of all sorts of accustomed conveniences, the dubious prospect for those we love, and for many of us physical danger and death. Of course there is something on the credit side as well, which we assuredly ought not to ignore—the inspiration of a cause to which we can devote ourselves, and which gives a new significance to our lives and actions—new patterns of comradeship into which we enter. It is not true to say that everything is pitch black. But after all, some day the cause will be won and most of the comradeships dissolved. And then where shall we be? And what shall we have? Even on the most favorable reckoning it looks obvious to common sense that liabilities loom far larger than assets; and we seem to be the victims of a most colossal stroke of sheer ill-luck.

That is what the virtuoso of the ether-waves had in mind. He was try-

ing to be grimly realistic, and issuing a warning against Pollyannas; and so far he was right. But I think my Australian letter refutes him. Here is a couple, alone and old and far from well. They are used to easy ways; but suddenly they must forego the conveniences which mean so much to aged folks. What do they do? Concentrate on some hypothetical silver lining to the cloud? By no means! They accept the situation and grapple with it in all its grimness. But they find a working philosophy which transforms grimness into opportunity. And they come through to a constructive issue. If they can, so can you and I! So can all of us!

It is a curious but unquestionable fact that human beings tend to be more clear-headed about basic values in times of adversity than when everything is easy. This is our real consolation in these war days. To say you and I cannot get constructive and lasting values out of this thing which has come upon us is a lie. To do so we should certainly not try to be Pollyannas. But we must be learners. And this we can all of us accomplish. We need not, and indeed should not, bother too much about the "bright side" even though it is there. But we do need to regard this whole great flood of new experiences as a challenge to discriminate what matters from what does not matter in our personal lives. Here is a lesson which we can most certainly learn. Most certainly, too, it can carry us through this emergency; and we can carry it with us when the emergency is passed. It can give us strength and serenity now, and in the days that are to come.

This lesson can be put in very definite and simple words. . . . It has, as a matter of fact, been repeated again and again, with endless variations, for immemorial ages. It is not one of those cheap formulas, guaranteed, like some trick medicine, to cure at once any and every mental ill, or the shoddy and superficial invention of a moment. On the contrary, the profoundest thinkers of our race have echoed and re-echoed it along the corridors of history. It has been rediscovered again and again in succeeding generations by innumerable men and women, just as my two old friends rediscovered it. . . .

Here it is. We should focus our living and center our hearts upon the fulfillment, the upbuilding, the strengthening of human personality in ourselves and others. This is what matters. Human personality itself is the supreme and central value, and the key to all right choices and all lasting satisfactions. It is a classic doctrine, and of course the very center of our democratic conception of human society. But also it should be under-

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stood and applied as an intimate, helpful, constructive personal philosophy of life by individual men and women. My old couple in the remote Australian town, although they did not put it explicitly into words, grasped it in just this sense. In a moment of great emergency and hard trial they simply discovered—themselves. . . .

Defeatism

ON the learning of this lesson, the achievement and application of this philosophy, depends our ability to make something constructive out of what is happening to ourselves and to the world. The poet Keats condensed it into a pregnant alternative which sharpens up the whole issue. "This world," he said, "is not a vale of tears. It is a vale of soul-making."

There lies the whole difference between moral victory and defeat. If ever this world seemed convincingly like a place of blood and tears and nothing else, it does so now. Yet moral defeatism begins by accepting the appearance for inevitable reality. The radio commentator of whom I spoke did exactly this; and plenty of others are following in his train, and are shaping their whole lives on the assumption. In present happenings they can see nothing constructive, nothing but the threat of sheer disaster for themselves and others. The careers on which they had set their hearts are imperiled. The plans on which they had counted are frustrated. Safe and familiar ways have suddenly become untenable. Danger and death, so long the merest phantoms, now loom within the circle of possibilities.

And there seems nothing they can do about it.

One must not dismiss such a viewpoint as mere selfishness or cowardice. The reasons for it are far too obvious. But as a working philosophy of life it points straight toward demoralization. There are, perhaps, not a great many who go all the way. The complete collapse of confidence and strength, fortunately, is not very common, even in the midst of these dark emergencies. We all know those who become completely unnerved, who can do nothing but wring their hands and broadcast gloom and lamentation, and whose conversation and thoughts are always full of dismal forebodings for the world and for themselves alike. Yet it is not circumstances, as such, which crush these unhappy people, but rather the way in which they deal with them—their attitude toward them. . . .

Many save themselves from it by some kind of evasion. They try to ignore events. They refuse to listen to bad news, or to believe that evil things can really come to pass. For

instance, there are plenty of men and women who cheer themselves up by believing, deep in their hearts, that this is bound to be a short and easy war, or that the government cannot really mean what it says when it announces restrictions. When they hear or read warnings to the contrary, they tend to shrug them off as propaganda, and to let only pleasant and promising utterances sink in. . . . They are, presumably, somewhat better off than those who simply go to pieces. But they are profoundly unrealistic and unwise just the same. They are unhelpful to themselves and to others also, for they are living on a principle not of strength but of weakness. They have the reward of a certain cheerfulness; but it does not amount to very much or carry very far, because it is shallow-rooted. In days like these facile optimism, and the vague hope that somehow matters will turn out well, is a fragile and unstable attitude, very thinly partitioned from despair. It is at the mercy of circumstances, and can always, in a moment, collapse when things go wrong.

Others, and they are not a few, achieve something better. They admit that things are bad, and very bad. They can see nothing but what is dubious and dark in the outlook for the world in general, and for themselves. They know that destiny is threatening, and they accept it to the full. But they tell themselves that, come what may, they can take it.

Such an attitude is far from ignoble. Those who adopt it have at any rate taken up a position from which they cannot easily be bombed out by bad news and untoward happenings. Indeed one often hears it highly praised and warmly recommended. But this much it hardly deserves, for it is limited and essentially defensive. "The storm is bad, but we shall ride it out. The days are evil, but we propose to survive. . . ." Such people intend to carry through, and may well do so. But there the matter ends. They have not the slightest hope or expectation of achieving even that without being permanently weakened, scarred, and harmed.

Complete collapse, false optimistic evasions, stern resolution to endure the worst—all are variants of defeatism. Fate is harsh and hostile. It attacks our most cherished values. Its constant threat is to take away everything that makes life worth while. The world is a vale of tears, and we must pass through it as well as we can.

Postulate of Victory

BUT there is an entirely different way of facing adversity and difficulty and the challenges of life. It has nothing to do either with false optimism, or superficial cheerfulness,

or with hunching up one's shoulders and saying that one can take it. Rather it depends on seeing the world, not as a vale of tears, but as a vale of soul-making, and going ahead on this assumption, which can very properly be called *the postulate of victory*. There is no doubt whatever that a great many people, because they are guided by this principle, are able to keep on top of events during the emergency, and are going to come out of it all stronger and better than they ever were before. And there is also no doubt that every one of us can do as much if he will. . . .

Our old vocations are gone with the wind. Can we not survey ourselves and the scene about us, and set to work building in ourselves new powers, new insights, new resources which will serve us well? We are drafted into the armed forces. Must we take it as an unavoidable misfortune, mitigated by the thought that at least we are doing something for our country and for the cause of freedom? Why not regard it also as a great adventure, a great experience, to be accepted gladly and wholeheartedly, and one that can enlarge our horizons and strengthen our courage? Or perhaps we are among those who must stand aside from the main course of events for a while, or even for the entire length of the war. In some respects this is the hardest challenge of all. But surely even so we can find opportunities for added kindness, added control, wiser and warmer humanity, and for the doing of what seem like uninspiring tasks better than ever before—something that will make us better men and women, and be of at least a little help to those with whom we deal. We should not merely seek to come through these times of stress. That is the wrong way to go about doing even so much. We should—and most assuredly we can—learn and benefit from them all the rest of our lives, and help our children to do likewise.

So this book does not preach consolation or mere endurance. It preaches victory—victory in the face of trial and deprivation, victory in the face of loneliness and loss and a doubtful future, victory in the face of bereavement and death. Victory we can have. Men and women, now and always, can organize their moral victory about the postulate that human personality itself is the supreme value, the central end and aim.

This is a philosophy which carries into every aspect and activity of our lives. And we can get along with nothing less. What corner of our lives does this war leave untouched? We feel its pressure and challenge in the family circle, in our friendships, in the material phases of our existence, in our planning for ourselves

and for our children, in our careers. In all these respects its challenge must be met; and we can make that challenge either destructive or constructive. It is in the moral as well as in the strategical and social sense a total war; and we can deal with it only by a total philosophy of living.

Tennyson once compared the man "whose will is strong" to a rock ringed about and beaten by the tempest. I do not think the metaphor a good one, and I here propose a better. In his autobiography Jack London has told us how he used to shout and sing in sheer exultation as he drove his over-sailed cat-boat through the tide rips and surges of San Francisco Bay. There, I suggest, is the truer parable. The human spirit triumphant over fate—that is the theme to cling to and live by in such days as these. This is the answer to all defeatism, to all who say that what has come upon us is nothing but misfortune, with no possibility of good. Such claims are simply false. All through the ages, in times of trial, men and women have lived in such a way as to make mock of them. And so can we today. We can do it by centering upon the values of human goodness and human personality in ourselves and others—by treating the world through which we pass not as a vale of tears, but as a vale of soul-making.

CHAPTER II

COURAGE

The Conditions of Courage

"SO act as to treat humanity, whether in thine own person or in that of another, always as an end withal, never as a means only." This is the central doctrine of our wartime philosophy of life. When we ask how it applies we find that it indicates two controlling attitudes, the first toward ourselves and our own problem, the second directed toward others. The first is courage, and the second is fellowship.

Courage is a virtue greatly admired, greatly praised, often recommended. That it is also greatly needed in days like these hardly needs saying. It is required not only by those of us who must meet physical danger and possible death, but also to face anxiety, bad news, a doubtful future, separation from loved ones, deprivation, and also and by no means least of all just sheer boredom and a paralyzing and dismaying sense of uselessness. It can carry us through the emergency; and if we build it into ourselves now—as many are undoubtedly doing—it will serve us well all through our lives.

But the question is how to do this. Much has been written and said on the subject of courage. But one can

search a very long time without finding any clear and simple statement of the conditions necessary for its achievement. This is rather more than a pity. There is not one of us who would not wish to be courageous. To override worry and fear, to face threats and problems with high-hearted confidence—what a blessing! So much is perfectly obvious. But the trouble is that we don't know how.

Yet we can know. The basic conditions of courage are neither obscure nor doubtful. Psychologists have been familiar with them for long enough; and although one must dig into technical writings, and collate a good deal of material to find out what has been said, the outcome is surprisingly definite and clear-cut. Moreover the formula—for it is hardly less than that—will get results when put into practice. For instance, those responsible for the training of soldiers know perfectly well what it is, and put it into operation very effectively. They have to know what it is, for it is their brutally practical task to prepare men in such a way that they will not easily go to pieces in the shock of battle; and that is an educational job which has to be properly done, and no maybe about it. But for some strange reason no one seems to have thought it worth while to put the nub of the whole matter into words for the benefit of the rest of us, although plenty of others besides soldiers need to learn how to be brave.

The whole thing can be summed up in a sentence. Courage depends upon planned action for a constructive goal. It has two closely interrelated conditions which, taken together and applied, will guarantee it as well as anything can be guaranteed in human life. We must face an emergency, not in terms of feeling, but in terms of intelligent action. And we must aim toward constructive outcomes. These two conditions it is in our power to fulfill.

Courage and Planned Action

SINCE the point has already been brought up, let us return for a moment to the building of bravery as part of military training. Why is it that a body of soldiers will show more courage under fire than a mob of civilians? Surely not because the soldiers have something in their blood stream which the civilians lack. Surely not because they were born braver. The reason is that they have been taught to prepare for just such events. For months they have been learning what to do, how to co-operate with one another, how to obey orders, how to use their weapons, when to take the initiative, how to attack, how to protect themselves. So, when the emergency comes, they are not help-

less victims of their emotions. They neither fling themselves upon the enemy, nor rush frantically away. They may, indeed, be scared or excited. But such feelings do not take charge. Reason takes charge. They have a plan of action, an intelligible means of meeting and dealing with the situation. Here is an essential condition of courage.

THIS ties in directly to our basic wartime philosophy. Action governed by fear or rage tends toward formlessness. It is a surrender of a man's own personal self, a relapse toward the primitive, the sub-human. Courage, on the other hand, is the assertion of a man's own self, as an active, reasoning being, in the face of circumstance. Emerson put it: "Courage is equality to the situation before us." Courage is reasoned action.

There is a character who appears in several of John Buchan's novels—the tough old Afrikaner scout named Pieter Pienaar. From Buchan's autobiography we know that he was an actual personality, not a fictitious invention. Pieter has a formula, a saying, to which he comes back again and again when difficulties are thickest and trials most dismaying: "Ek sal 'n Plan mak," he says: "I will make a plan." Again and again it has been his salvation when things seemed hopeless, and when the deadly temptation of surrendering to wild and aimless impulse or passive despair would most certainly have been fatal. For him it is the very heart of courage—a courage which expresses itself, not in violence or boasting, but in a calm and quiet self-assertion, a serene, almost placid confidence. "Ek sal 'n Plan mak!" There is the wisdom of the old wilderness scout. . . . A plan—and the best one you can make—is salvation from panic, and the chance of success. Don't let the situation take charge. Take charge of it, as wisely and intelligently as you can.

Vilhjalmur Stefansson, the great Arctic explorer, says exactly the same thing in telling what to do if one is caught far away from shelter in a polar blizzard, which is none too bad a parallel to the way many people are feeling in the world today. Never, he says, wander blindly. Never trust to that delusive thing, your "sense of direction." You need a more stable clue than that. Sit down and recall the twists and turns of the course you have been following. From this, figure out the direction of your camp. Then decide upon the way to go, start off, and stick to it even though it may seem wrong, making systematic casts from side to side. If you find yourself growing tired, don't push on frantically until exhaustion drags you down. Take a rest, and if need be, a nap. If you have not drained away

your strength in futile struggling, the cold will waken you before you have come to any harm. Rely not on your emotions, but on your reason. (Indeed he even goes so far as to say, in effect, rely on geometry.) This is the way, and the only sure way, to resist panic; and panic will most surely be your end. Your plan may not work out and get you through. But it is your best chance, and a good one.

Admiral Byrd, in that truly terrifying book of his, *Alone*, tells a similar tale. If you have read the book you will remember that he decided to camp in complete solitude nearly a hundred and fifty miles south of Little America, on the ice of the Barrier, all through the long and dreadful Antarctic night. One of his regular routines, after daylight had gone and the darkness was continuous, was to take a walk for exercise, whenever the weather allowed. During one such walk there befell him surely as appalling an experience as could ever come to any man. He was strolling in the icy stillness, deep in thought, when suddenly it flashed upon him that he had lost his camp. He had not been attending to his direction. The Barrier was a vast, even, snow-covered waste. Its surface was so hard that his feet had left no trace. His little shack itself was masked in white, utterly indistinguishable. He tells us that for an endless moment he was sick with horror and self-reproach. Yet if he had given way to fear, he would inevitably have been doomed. He would have quartered wildly over the vast, iron-bound desert of ice and snow until a storm came up, or he sank down exhausted. But he pulled himself together and made a plan. He scraped up a little heap of frosted snow, took his bearings by the stars, advanced a measured number of steps, and made another heap. So little by little, by sighting back and forth, he explored the area about him, always able to return to his starting point. At long last he came upon the marker flags which would steer him home.

COURAGE, then, stems from planned action. The principle is as simple as that. And it is exceedingly practical. A ship's captain carries out lifeboat drills for the reason that the best way to avoid a panic is for everyone to know where to go and what to do in an emergency. British commando troops rehearse every detail of an operation before undertaking it, so that nothing may be left to the inspiration of impulse of the moment. And of course the idea applies to our civilian emergencies also. . . .

There are going to be plenty of times and occasions during these war days when fear will steal toward us and threaten to overwhelm us. We may have to face the prospect of los-

ing our jobs and our livelihoods, the prospect of losing our homes and our loved ones, the prospect of challenges and strange associations, the prospect of injury and death. Often it will seem to us that alarm and worry are simply unavoidable. Those are the moments when it is well to remind ourselves that they positively can be avoided. Rational self-assertion, co-ordinated action—that is the answer. And even if, on this or that occasion, it does not carry us all the way, it can always reduce destructive emotion to manageable proportions, and make possible a quick recovery of poise. It can take the curse out of fear. It can, in the tremendous Biblical phrase, rescue us "from the power of the dog." . . .

It is very certain that in these days which have come upon us, many of us must face the ultimate challenge of untimely death. So any personal philosophy worth while for war time cannot shirk this most formidable and exacting of all issues. Such a philosophy must provide both for those who will give their lives, and for those who must endure bereavement, a clear line of help and guidance. How does our doctrine of courage tell us to confront death? This is indeed an acid test of its validity and honesty.

War time has a certain moral uniqueness which lies in the fact that death comes to many of us, not as an accident or a misfortune, but simply in the normal line of duty. In peaceful days this is usually not so, at least for the great majority of us. For then death is an interruption of our ordinary pursuits, not a direct consequence of them. And so, perhaps, in times like these, we can perceive with clearer insight something which should always be evident to us—that life and death are all of a piece—that the way we are able to face death depends entirely on the way we live, and on the purposes to which we devote ourselves.

As the very beginning of wisdom it is well to recall to mind an extremely obvious but extremely pertinent point which is often overlooked. Our choice is not between dying and endless life. It is only between death soon or late. The American sergeant of Marines at Belleau Wood in the last great war put the whole case in a nutshell when he shouted to his hesitating men: "Come on, you —; do you want to live forever?" That is not a bad thought, either for soldiers going into battle, or for all of us who must face the possibility of death, even though the line of our ordinary duty may not itself take us to the threshold. It has the tonic strength of absolute realism and honesty.

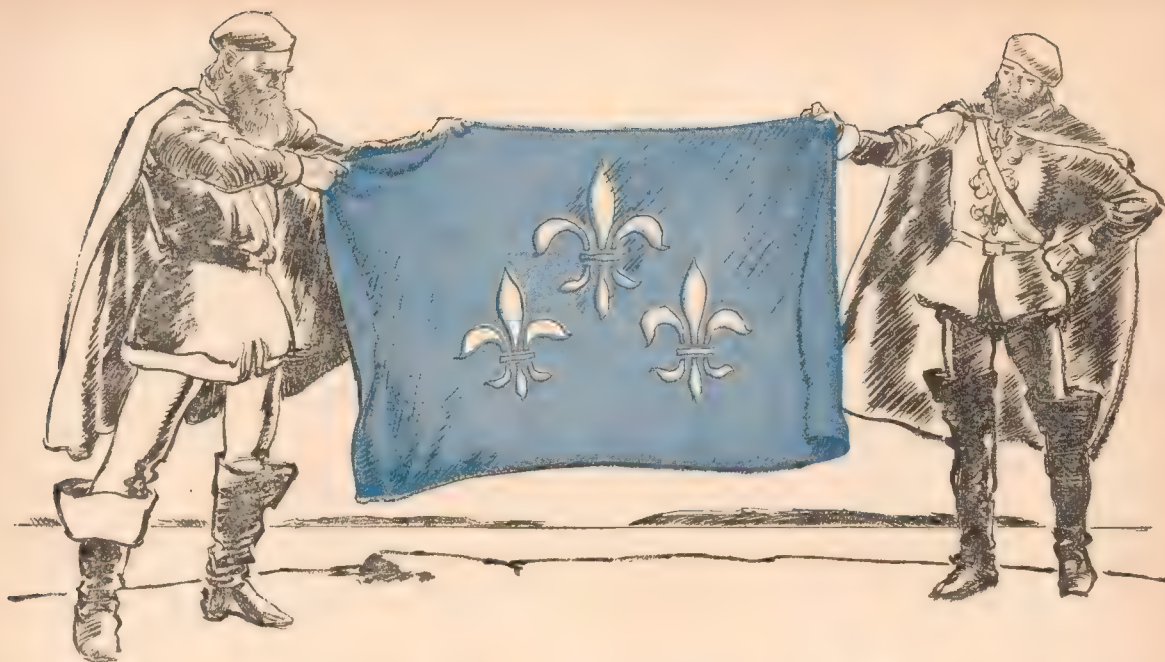
Clearly then, what matters is not how long we live, but how well we live. We shall none of us live so very long, in any case! The whole signifi-

cance of death, yours and mine, depends altogether upon its context, its setting in the pattern of our lives. This is why those who live nobly and for constructive ends are able to face death courageously; and why those they leave behind can feel, even in their sorrow, that everything has not been lost and wasted. . . .

OUR doctrine of courage, then, applies in this sense to the supreme emergency of death. We direct our choices and steer our actions toward the strengthening, the upbuilding, the fulfillment, the liberation of human personality in ourselves and others. This is the sure source of serenity and certainty of mind and heart, because it is the basic principle of constructive living. And it enables us to face death as we should, because we know we . . . have built something that endures, both in ourselves and others.

Courage based on wisdom, then, is the answer to the threat of death, both for those who must die, and for those who must suffer bereavement. The publicist and editor, William Allen White, of Emporia, Kansas, lost his daughter just as she was on the threshold of womanhood. In his exquisite and moving tribute to her he tells us how, in spite of all his grief, he was upheld by an awareness of shining and imperishable values. He had watched her grow, both in body and spirit, from a tiny baby. Year by year her personality had unfolded in beauty and strength; and she had shed more and more light on those about her. He speaks, with fondest love, of the many friends she made, of the many and diverse people who came to know her, to watch for her passing on the streets, to be interested in her doings and her welfare, and to be warmed by her kindness. And he intimates that to have had so bright a creature in his life had given him something he could never lose, and had made him a better and more serviceable man.

All this, surely, strikes a chord deep in our hearts in these war days. We are reminded that the time is short. But this need come to us as no message of fear and doom. It should be a challenge to live more completely in the dignity of manhood and womanhood, more steadfastly to seek and build enduring values in ourselves, more solicitously to encourage and strengthen those with whom we have to do. This is the secret of courage—courage for living and courage for death. And for those who go out to die? They are dying in the cause of human freedom itself, that cause which, as I am urging in these pages, should be made the mainspring and principle of every individual life and the central doctrine of our war-time philosophy.



Diamonds from Canada

by H. BEDFORD-JONES

WITH the murderous roar of the musket upon the snowy morning, with the fall of Valmont as the bullet reached him, with his plunge from the trail on the cliff to the depths below, many things ended well. So said the two murderers, turning back to join the Indian guides; and pitched upon a likely yarn to account for Valmont's disappearance. Everyone at winter quarters was too sick to care, and what the Indians thought was of no consequence.

Jean Valmont was the royal commissioner, a quiet fellow; he knew enough of pilotage to lend the master pilot, Jacques Cartier, a hand with helm or altitude or ink-quill.

How far back did matters go? Perhaps into the early fall, when nobody dreamed what sort of winter would be encountered. Everyone agreed that to spend the winter here in Canada would be a merry experience. That was the name given the place: Canada. In the Huron tongue the word stood for village; to mistake it for the name of the land was easy. Master Cartier gave names to everything and wasted no time about it.

For example, this big cape beside the winter quarters: The Indian town

was called Stadaka. When the ships came pushing upriver and the crews sighted that great cape thrusting out into the stream like a hungry man's nose, a laugh went up. "*Quel bec!* What a beak!" cried one of the Norman seamen. Amid the laughter, Master Cartier said it was a good name, and "*Quebec*" it should be.

Yet one must seek farther still, before ever the ships left St. Malo, city of corsairs and fishermen and stout seafarers. If there were trouble in the autumn, it began far back in early spring at St. Malo, when Master Cartier was fitting out his three little ships. He had coasted Canadian shores the previous year, bringing back with him two Indians who came from far up the great unknown river.

Flags of our Fathers—IV

"So blew our Lilies by sea and shore and mountain, by arctic wastes and western isle, in smoke of council-fire and scalp-dance, chanting mute orisons of praise to the greater glory of God. The golden Lilies, uplifting hearts of men across wrack of broken battle and foundered hope, to the sweetly serene loveliness of heaven itself."

In this spring of 1535, the king had put up money for more thorough work. To ascend the vast river and open up the kingdoms of the Grand Khan would be fairly simple, bringing back shiploads of treasure for greedy King François. Diamonds, rubies and gold beyond any computation—thus ran the intent—must be well itemized for the king's account. Therefore a royal commissioner must go with the ships. To whom the appointment?

Sieur Jean Valmont, a lesser gentleman of the court—and notable for nothing—got it. He got it despite the influence and wire-pulling of the Vicomte de Laroux, who drew by way of consolation the lesser post of royal treasurer with the ships. Valmont was slim, quietly pleasant, slightly studious; the vicomte was a ruffling braggart who looked at the end, never at the means.

Both men were in their early twenties. Both came to St. Malo while the ships were being readied. Both fell heartily in love with Yseult of the Blue Eyes, daughter of a Malouin captain. So there lay cause in plenty for hot blood and enmity.

The vicomte promised Yseult diamonds galore to glitter in her corn-silk hair. Valmont promised her noth-

ing; he had little luck in love. Due to the rivalry and enmity of Laroux, he tried hard not to become desperately in love with Yseult of the Blue Eyes, for it was easy to see that her liking lay with the vicomte and her hopes with the diamonds.

Of these were plenty to be had. The two Indians, now converted and clad as Frenchmen, were to serve as guides and interpreters. They spoke French by this time; they said the gold was plentiful in the kingdom of Saguenay, beyond the river of that name,



Valmont was not sure what happened, until his next waking.

while diamonds were everywhere along the streams for the picking up.

So with great hopes and a devout blessing in the old church on the rock of St. Malo, Master Cartier piloted his ships westward, two fair ships and a little tender. They came to the Banks and to Terre Neuve, and pressed on into the wide river beyond.

They reached the Saguenay tributary, but the kingdom of that name lay somewhere beyond. They reached Quebec. It was decided to winter here, laying up the two larger vessels in the little St. Croix river. Valmont remained to put the winter quarters in shape while Jacques Cartier, with the tender and the small boats, pushed on upstream to the walled city of

Hochelaga, to treat with the emperor there.

No emperor was found, however; and in place of his lordly city, the master pilot discovered only a palisaded Indian town. But from the hill he named Mont Real, he could see the upper courses of the St. Lawrence and of the Ottawa. By means of these, obviously, in the spring one could reach the territories of the Grand Khan. Out there in the western reaches were the rubies and gold beyond computation. So Cartier turned back to rejoin the ships, spend a joyous winter and then finish his work.

At Quebec, meanwhile, Valmont fell afoul of the vicomte and of Gros Michel, a hotheaded Norman seaman, a swaggering bold heart of a man with huge red beard. He and Laroux kept heady company; jealousy pricked them against Valmont, and when they found

some gold flakes and a few diamonds up the shore, sharp trouble arose. Valmont demanded that this loot be entered to the royal account, and the vicomte flatly refused.

"Are you thinking of the king or of *la belle Yseult*?" snapped the vicomte hotly, fingering his dagger hilt.

"Keep your knife for cutting meat, which is its purpose," said Valmont, his eyes twinkling as the other grew more furious. "As for Yseult, I'm not sure but blue eyes think more of diamonds than the man who brings them. There can be no more treasure-hunting, or all the men will be insane for treasure: we've wood to cut and meat to salt and fish to bring in, which just now are more important."

Valmont had his way in the end, as he usually did, for Cartier returned in time to stop the quarrel. There was no denying that Valmont represented the royal authority. In his keeping was the king's flag which Cartier ran up beside the tall wooden cross when he took possession of this unknown land for France. It was of thin blue wool, broided with three golden fleurs-de-lis. Back in France they were talking about changing the blue background to white, in memory of Jeanne d'Arc's white banner, but this had not come to any decision.

WITH the first drifting snow, there was no more thought of going in search of gold and jewels. The snow was a surprise, and the Canadian frost was a foretaste of hell to men who had never experienced it. Neither French garments nor flimsy winter quarters were suited to it. Besides, many of the men were down with scurvy and more fell sick every day, although there was no lack of good salt meat in the casks; no one knew what caused this dread sickness, nor how to cure it.

Gros Michel, with his mammoth red beard, impressed the Indians enormously. These Hurons at Stadaka were hospitable, friendly folk, but Gros Michel pressed hospitality and friendship a bit too far. Trouble arose over a slim merry wench named Bright Feather; her father was Little Moose, an old chief of importance. Gros Michel came close to losing his scalp, but Valmont had him put in irons and the Hurons were appeased.

Not so the Vicomte de Laroux, whom most of the men likewise backed up in his fury. These rough seamen had scant respect for any royal authority, especially in this new land, and Valmont, caught unawares by the mob, had a bad time of it until Cartier appeared to bring down more of the crews and nip the riot properly. The upshot was that both Gros Michel and Laroux asked pardon and bided their time, which came soon enough.

The rotting sickness, passing them by, struck down others until men be-

gan to die of it. The horrible cold, past anything ever known, and the incredible quantities of snow, did to men's minds what scurvy did to the bodies. At length scarcely a dozen men were able to tend camp and bring in firewood.

"There must be some way to cope with this sickness, could we find it," Cartier said one desolate day, as he talked with Jean Valmont. "It doesn't affect the Indians, even at sea. I remember when I was a lad of twenty, back in 1510, a Honfleur ship picked up one of these Indian bark canoes off the English coast. It had seven copper warriors in it, and six of them were dead; yet no scurvy had touched them. They had voyaged all the way to England, without it. Could you get about in the frost and snow outside here?"

"A little," said Valmont. "I've been practicing on these hoops crossed with thongs, with which the Indians walk on the snow. Tennis racquets, the men call them."

"Fresh meat might help to cure this scurvy disease," said Cartier, anxiety in his haggard, bearded features. "Take a couple of the strongest men and go out with some of the Indians, who say the caribou herds are not far away; perhaps you can bring in meat."

Valmont went among the men, most of whom were affected by the sickness. The strongest of those yet afoot were Gros Michel and the vicomte. He took them aside.

"Comrades, forget what's past; it's no time to think of gold and women. Red-blooded meat is needed to prevent the sickness, and we're the best fitted of all hands to go out with the redskins and get it. Shall we do what we can for the general good?"

They said yes, but not too gladly. Most men had not set foot outdoors since the frost came and every crack and cranny was plugged tight day and night. So all three cracked a bottle of wine and clicked mugs together, Norman fashion, with hard feelings put aside.

The three sallied forth with a party of Huron hunters, and after some days of travel found the caribou herds. The muskets helping, a great killing was made, and all the Indians fell to work cutting up the meat.

LAROUX and Michel chose a moment when there was none to see, following Valmont and knocking him off the cliff trail with a musket-shot, as has been told. They went back with a likely yarn that passed muster.

Master Cartier was sad at losing Valmont, and sad as well at losing the royal flag, which had vanished with the commissioner. Flags were hard to come by. As a matter of fact, Valmont had wrapped it about his body under his garments; not for love of it,

but to keep some warmth in his bones during the perishing cold of the hunt. Being of good Flemish wool, it served this purpose well.

There was no great amount of cold, however, in the deep snow where he fell. After a time he was awakened by pain, and thus saved from an endless slumber; he was stiff and sore, and his clothes were caked with frozen blood. He gathered energy and made repeated efforts to get himself out of the snow. Every movement was agony to his body, and he had to drag one leg, which was obviously broken. Yet he forced himself grimly at the task; though he seemed to accomplish nothing, he moved by inches.

With the dying day, which did not endure a long while in these parts, he knew it was useless. The pain was numbed now. Upon a quivering sigh, he gave up the attempt and sank back into the snow. More of it blew over him as he lay, and the warmth was grateful. He dropped off into slumber which might easily have been his last.

However, he was awakened to flashing ruddy light in the darkness, and to sharp terror. Indian dogs were snuffing about him, tugging at his clothes. At first he thought them wolves, until he was aware of the

torch held aloft by a tall Indian, while another came to help him. He recognized them both, with a feeble cry of joy. The one with the torch was the chief, Little Moose; the other was Pierre, his nephew, one of the two interpreters, and a lively fellow.

AFTER this, Valmont was not sure what happened, until his next waking.

Now he lay in a Huron lodge, a winter lodge of heavy elm-bark; although soft furs were under and over him, he was conscious of acute pain if he moved. He found that he lay naked under the furs, his own clothes lying at one side and with them the flag he had worn about his body. It was torn and spotted with blood.

He remembered everything; the shot, the fall, the agonizing hurt. He could use his hands, and these told him of bandages about his body and his left leg. A placid old broad-faced Huron squaw sat beside him, feeding him meat broth. When he had finished the bowl, she rose and went out, with shrill calls. Presently came Little Moose the chief, and with him the slim merry wench, Bright Feather his daughter—whom Valmont scarcely noticed at the moment—and the interpreter Pierre.

Valmont's first thought was to send word to Jacques Cartier of his plight, and that he was alive; to this his hosts calmly replied that he was far better off here than there.

Little Moose was at his winter hunting-quarters, with squaw and daughter, and intended to remain here. He was delighted to have a white man and his nephew Pierre as guests. As for Pierre, he had discarded his French garments and his French smile; he was a savage again, and glad of it. He was not anxious, indeed he refused pointblank, to return to what with sad exactitude he termed the stinking quarters of the white men.

"They killed you; your good spirit sent us to save you," said he. "If I went back and said you were alive, the Manitou would be angry. They would come and kill you again. You are better off here, for soon they will all be dead."

Better, that is, for purposes of ultimate plunder. If the whites lived through the winter, well and good; they were friends and had wonderful things to trade, especially firewater. If they died, then these ships and arms and metal knives were gifts from the Manitou. These Indians were avid for iron, to replace their chipped flint weapons.

When Jean Valmont investigated his own condition, his impatience died away. That musket-ball, striking him in the back, had broken two ribs and torn a large gash in passing out of the flesh. In Europe, such a wound would



*He found himself
humble before
this girl.*

have meant almost certain death, infection usually resulting from any bullet-wound. The Hurons, however, only laughed at his dismay. The squaws would treat it with herbs, Pierre said, with a nod at Bright Feather and her mother; such a wound was nothing. The leg Valmont had broken in his fall was far more important; it would keep him helpless for some time.

The rotting sickness? The Hurons had never heard of it. Pierre, of course, knew about scurvy, but could offer no help. It had begun to attack Valmont; his puffed and bleeding gums interested the old squaw. She nodded and pointed to a bit of spruce bough; whereas he grunted in dismay, thinking she had misunderstood.

It was his mistake, however.

THE days slid away into weeks, insensibly. Here in the lodge all was clean, passably warm, there was no lack of food, and Valmont took a keenly curious interest in his kindly hosts.

It was, perhaps, inevitable that the slim laughing girl should teach him a bit of her own language and should spend much of her idle time with him—not a great deal, since she and her mother alike were kept busy taking care of the furs and meat brought in by the two hunters.

Bright Feather was not the average plodding and dull-eyed Indian female. Her laughing sparkle sprang from an intelligence as vivid as it was rare among her people; her craving for knowledge startled Valmont, when he comprehended its breadth. There was in her a clean, fine quality that rose above her savage state and drew hard at him. Yet, for a while, his awareness was of himself rather than of her.

Circumscribed by the narrow limits of this new environment and drawn in upon himself, Jean Valmont came by degrees to a new valuation of his own affairs. He gained, for the first time, a focus upon the life he had left behind him in France, and the picture stood out in dreary clarity to his mind.

A younger son destined for preferment at court, his present appointment

came from a desire for riddance rather than from the king's favor; never had he known any definite purpose in that other world. What a life, compared with this gigantic struggle with elements, with forests and cold and hunger! It had been a pleasant existence of idle intolerance, of hatreds, of petty limited ambitions; pleasant, if one liked that sort of thing or were born to it. Now he could see Jean Valmont as one who had expected much from life. He had waited for office, fortune, love—and none had come. He was one of thousands of such men in France—well-born but good for nothing else than routine preferment.

"Damned empty vanity!" he thought as he lay there listening to the howl of the wind outside. "Any Malouin who can hand a line and hold tiller, knows more than I. Jacques Cartier, starving and hungering and rotting while he finds these new places in the world, puts me to shame. Such men do things, rather than wait for them to happen, like a fine gentleman! And this new country, this Canada, is surely a place to do things. What's here to do in the king's service?"

Obviously, to look into the matter of diamonds and gold and rubies.

Through Pierre, and by dint of his own application to the Huron tongue, he could reach his hosts well enough. This snowy, ice-bound country put a new aspect on the hope of picking up riches, and Valmont was not long in putting a shrewd evaluation upon these hopes and fine stories, which lay between fact and fancy. Gold there was, certainly; Pierre gave him a tiny quantity obtained from a chief in Stadaka. Whether it were the same as the golden flecks the men had found in the river-sands, he could not tell.

Diamonds there were, beyond question; but were they diamonds? Three or four had been found; like the gold, these pebbles must be tested by men who knew their business. Pierre, who had seen gold and rubies in France, stuck to his story of infinite gold and rubies over to the westward, where lay the kingdom of Saguenay. Probably, as Cartier believed, on the borders of

Cathay, from which this great river must obviously come.

Pierre stuck to his other stories, also, about great cities, greater than Hochelaga, lying to the westward, and men wearing armor, and vast bodies of water on which were ships. Valmont was inclined to think that Pierre talked to please his hearers rather than to give a true report; and a certain attitude of skepticism on the part of the girl toward her far-traveled relative strengthened this opinion.

He renewed his efforts to get Pierre to carry a message to Jacques Cartier; again Pierre refused. There had been trouble between the men in the winter quarters, and the Indians in Stadaka town, he said—trouble so bad that Pierre had no intention of going near the white men again. There was no urgency now about any message, however, and Valmont let the matter die. He was doing well here.

His scurvy-symptoms had vanished. This, according to the old squaw, was due to an infusion of spruce wood and pine-shoots, which she told him how to make. He found himself regarding Little Moose with an odd admiration; the old chief had what to Valmont was oracular sagacity in the ways of life here. He was efficient in every detail; there was nothing unexpected in his life, no emergency for which he was not ready. As for Bright Feather—well, Valmont was increasing daily—and most pleasurably—in his knowledge of the Huron tongue.

HE did not deny the obvious; he was not one to shrink from the truth. He found himself humble before this savage girl, whose modesty, tenderness, and simplicity were above any he had seen in France. He knew that she liked him, as his own heart went out to her; in these long weeks they had studied one another thoroughly, and to him at least amazingly.

Ysult of the blue Eyes—he laughed at that memory now, derision in his heart; the wench wanted diamonds, not love, so let her have diamonds!

The truth broke upon Valmont in these days of hobbling about the lodge.

Illustrated by
Herbert Morton Stoops





*With the roar of the
musket, with the fall
of Valmont as the
bullet reached him,
things ended well.
So said the two
murderers.*

All he had waited for so long in France, and so vainly, had come to him here; but it could not be carried back to France. Love and position and fortune—here they were his. The Hurons approved him. Wealth, such as it was, could be his for the taking.

It was something to think about.

Oddly enough, he found that the vivid interest of Bright Feather, and of the others as well, centered in the flag he had brought along. Pierre had only vague notions of it. But explanations were difficult.

"The old kings of France used to carry the blue cloak of St. Martin into battle," he said. "The banner of the abbey of St. Denis took its place. This was a banner given by heaven to one of the ancient kings; it had golden lilies on it. So later the lilies were put on this blue flag—"

Failure; too involved to get across. The Manitou had given lilies in a dream, was what they made of it. Why lilies?

"Because they're the flowers of heaven," Valmont said, rather lamely. "Look how finely woven is this wool. A flag is no common piece of cloth. Eh, what now?"

Argument waxed high, to his blank dismay. When Valmont was shot, the flag had been wrapped around him. Therefore, said Little Moose, it was not good medicine. Pierre objected that Valmont would have been killed without its protection, and the Manitou had sent them to his aid. But, grunted the chief, there were no lilies on the ghost-trail; medicine men had said so. Why, then, the lilies?

"They stand for justice, chivalry, all ideals," said Valmont. "The flag stands for France, for loyalty to the king, to devotion to a whole system of life—"

Useless; though Bright Feather tried hard to comprehend, and perhaps did, not so the others. And that night Valmont looked up into the darkness, darkly stirred.

"What of my own loyalty and devotion?" he thought. "The greedy, corrupt king, the court falling into all the vices and depravities of Italy; the system of life—ha! Have I made myself see what they can't see? This new country is savage and vast; but take the snow and frost away—better perhaps than France! And all I waited for has come to me—"

He was more sure of it when he donned the garments Bright Feather had made for him; softly tanned and worked furs, which would keep out the frost. Her pride in the work so well done, her delight at his praises, the joyous understanding in her features when their eyes met, the leap of his own heart—yes, it was all plain to him now!

AND, that very night the cruel savagery of this new land, the unsuspected terror of it, came and reached into his soul in one hideous moment.

A yell and a welter of leaping shapes; the Iroquois war-whoop—"Sassakway! Sassakway!"—pealing like a wolf-howl among the trees; Little Moose with half a dozen arrows trans-

fixing his body, the squaw with a crushed skull. Valmont himself tumbling and rolling in the snow with a naked Mohawk, grappling and fighting down into the deep drifts with the ferocity of animals and lost there, knocked unconscious but throttling his assailant still—thus ended Jean Valmont's budding idyl in the Huron lodge. . . .

He crawled out in the darkness, later, to find only smoking embers left of the lodge, its contents scattered afar. No Bright Feather here; but Pierre showed up in the dawn, gashed and naked but alive, and helped him away. The two headed desperately for Stadaka, met a party of Huron warriors, and were safe.

All Valmont could see, all he could think of, was the tender dimpled smile of Bright Feather, and the promises that he had found in her love, and had lost again. The Hurons accompanied him to within sight of the ships and winter quarters and left him there, a stricken, haggard, grim-eyed man numbed with his own agony of heart.

It was perhaps inevitable that the girl should spend much of her idle time with him.



The flimsy barracks stood by the little river where the ships were iced in. Valmont called out as he came, but no one made response. A feeble smoke arose to tell of life within; and close by in the snow he saw wooden crosses ranged, and could guess their meaning only too well.

Then, when he stepped into the place, abhorrence mastered him.

A company afflicted with scurvy was a sight no one would wish to see twice, yet it was so common as to be held a necessary evil upon any voyage. No one knew what caused or cured it; the frightening thing was to behold it here in all its full effects, upon dry land.

Apparently no living creature was in the place. But when Valmont threw wood on the fire, and opened wide the doorway to let freshness into the fetid air that caught one by the throat, a feeble stir of dissent and protest went up. The bunks along the wall held men, or what remained of men; there was a ghostly futile movement, a thin squeaking anger. To speak with teeth rotted out and bodies that groaned at any motion was difficult, but fear of the cold fresh air made itself evident.

"Where's Master Cartier?" demanded Valmont. "Why don't ye get up and stir about?"

"Can't move hand or foot," mumbled a voice. "He's gone to the ships for food, with two others who can still walk."

The words were drowned in a ghastly laugh. Another man was pressing his thumbs into his flesh and watching the indentations that remained in his putty-like body; he had gone mad.

New and active horror awakened Valmont from his own stupor.

Shuddering, he fell to work; now he must be pack-horse and physician and house-slave all at once. Even to think of the hideous disorder and filth around him shrank the heart, but he attacked it as a relief from his inward grief and despair. He had to get wood, he had to find pine and spruce, he had to fill the kettles with snow to melt and get the place in decent shape.

In an hour he had changed everything, amid continual frantic protest from the bunks. The cold air still poured in, but a roaring fire was swift to warm it. Two big kettles on the fire were steaming with an infusion of spruce wood and pine shoots, as he had learned in the lodge. In the midst of this, along came stumbling and staggering the three men who had gone to the ships for provisions—Cartier himself, Gros Michel, and the Vicomte de Laroux.

Many and many a time, during those weeks, had Jean Valmont thought about the scene of his return from the dead, and how he would confront these men. Now it all dwindled to nothing; he scarcely recognized them, so changed were they by sickness and frostbite. They knew him, right enough; but there was no emotion left in them, no capacity for terror or amazement. Cartier greeted him with a wan embrace, the others only stared.

"Oh, I fell from a cliffside, was lost in the snow, broke my leg; Indians found me and kept me in their lodges," said he, thus dismissing the wonder of his being alive. "Let's to work; I can help with this sickness. I'll show you how fresh meat must be cooked—"

There was fresh meat, frozen away, but they had been afraid to use it.

NEXT day the spring thaws began. Of the redskins, nothing was seen; there had been no communication with Stadaka lately, though Cartier was eager to reestablish it. As for the vicomte, Jean Valmont was unable to keep entire silence. On a trip to the ship with Laroux, the other made some remark about their hunting excursion. Valmont gave him a look. "Save your talk, monsieur. I know, and the Indians know, how I came to fall from that cliff. The matter is closed; forget it."

Laroux regarded him with startled wonder, but made no response.

Almost at once, the men responded to the treatment Valmont had inaugurated. They crawled from their

bunks; they sopped down quantities of the evergreen infusion; they ventured out into the thawing open, and went aboard the ships to get them in shape. Valmont took two of them and went to the Indian town.

His few words of their language gained him instant welcome; also, Pierre was on hand. Most of the warriors were away. They had been gone ever since that raid, on a war-trail to the Iroquois country. Some trading took place, and Pierre came to him with a bundle; it was the flag. Pierre had been back to that scene of death and had retrieved it.

"Did you find any trace of her?" asked Valmont sadly.

Pierre shook his head.

"No. Perhaps they took her as a slave."

This thought hurt even worse. The head chief, Dannacona, had not gone with the war-party; he was an old man, and friendly. He was anxious to reopen trade with the white men, whose firewater was pleasant to the Huron taste; and, as the war-party might be gone for several weeks yet, a base of exchange for the winter's furs was soon amicably established.

CARTIER was glad enough of this, though furs were of scant interest to him. He questioned Valmont closely in regard to all he had learned about the gold and diamonds.

"There lies the most important quest," he said, gravely stroking his big flat beard. "We can't seek them now; that they're here, that the Saguenay kingdom is our goal, that it can be reached by the Ottawa river, we know. We've enough proof."

"Enough for what?" asked Valmont.

"To turn France upside down! No rubies; but here are diamonds and here's gold. I'm leaving the larger vessel here; with so many dead, we could scarcely man her. So leave her, and be off the minute the ice goes out of the river! Off like a bird—for I can see tremendous things afoot!"

"I hope your eagerness is well founded," began Valmont.

The other interrupted:

"Look! I know King François; now there's more ahead than a mere ship or two. Instead, we'll have twenty, thirty! In place of a few score seamen, colonists by the thousands—colonists, do you understand? Horses, oxen, sheep! We'll occupy this country of the savages and have a secure base for operations against Saguenay, and the dominions of Cathay beyond!"

Valmont, who smiled no more these days, regarded him gloomily.

"So sure, Master Cartier? King François does not hand out money easily!"

"So far as he's concerned, it's a certainty. I've been talking with M. de Laroux and we've a plan afoot."

"No nice plan, then, if he's back of it."

"On the contrary! As soon as the ice is out, we'll open trade with these redskins and broach a few kegs of brandy. At the proper time, we'll carry off the old chief and as many of his people as we can crowd aboard," said the master pilot, oblivious of the quick incredulous revulsion in Valmont's face.

"Aye, a worthy plan," he went on. "By the time we reach St. Malo, they'll be docile; and imagine the sensation at court! To present the King of Canada and his chief men—eh? His Majesty will be wild with delight. He'll lay out enough money next trip to make sure of all the gold and diamonds in Cathay—"

"You can't, you can't do such a thing!" burst out Valmont in furious protest. "Why, it's base treachery! And it denies everything—look there!" He pointed to the royal flag, repaired and ready to hoist. "Look at those golden lilies! I've told these people how they represent chivalry, honor,

he rasped. "Your talk is absurd. I propose to harm none of these people. I'll take them to France and bring them home again with the fleet; that's all. They'll see the world, have the honor of kissing His Majesty's hand, and return here with all the blessings of civilization. Don't be childish or emotional, I pray you."

gear and goods. The snows were thinning out, Indians were making ready their bark canoes; the end of the ghastly sojourn was at hand. Valmont saw brandy-kegs being brought forth for the carouse that would mark the trading with the Indians.

"What did he do, those weeks away?" A whisper began to follow



"Don't yap before you're hurt, mongrel," panted Valmont. "Up for it!"

justice—and such an action as you propose would mock at all I've said. It would deny the actual truth!"

The master pilot's thin lips firmed. "You forget yourself, monsieur. You can give advice; don't presume to give orders. I am the one to do that,"

He strode away, leaving Valmont despairing and heartsick. There was nothing to be done; nothing he could say or do would matter. And after all, was anything important now? His own fine dreams were gone with Bright Feather; let everything else go too!

Now the ice began to break up. The men were living aboard the ships, or rather aboard the two smaller vessels, stripping the largest of all her

Valmont about the ship, eyes peered after him. "He, if anyone, knows the secret of the gold and where the diamonds are, and how to trade for the rubies! Watch him, watch him! These redskins are friendly with him. Ere we set sail for home, he'll go to fill his pouch with diamonds!"

So ran the ugly words started by Gros Michel and Laroux. Valmont knew nothing of them; nor, had he known, would he have cared a jot. He had no heart in anything, and took no share in the general rejoicing at thought of seeing France again. . .

The ice was out of the great river now. Another day or two and it would break up in the St. Croix, the ships would be free, then off for *la belle France* with the Indian chiefs aboard!

Valmont, morose and taciturn, fled from the festive gathering. The Indians were flocking down to the trade and carouse; he could not stay here to witness what was coming. He wandered forth, in the afternoon, away from the ships and down to the still icy shores of the St. Lawrence, there to pace moodily along.

Out in midstream lay the bulk of the *Ile d'Orleans*, so named after the second son of the King. The flood was high with melted snows. To Valmont the mere sight of such a river was a wonder that would never cease. These natural glories, these rushing waters and winds and far white mountains, swept the cobwebs out of his mind. He remembered how Bright Feather had told him of this vast river, which frightened and fascinated her; how she had promised to take him to see certain of her favorite spots, when the ice was out. Well, the ice was out now, and—

He grimaced at the thought. And the flag, his flag, was blowing back there in treacherous welcome to the redskins! His flag, with the lilies—what a wealth of honor and high renown and chivalry could lie in a strip of cloth! And how it could be dishonored by those who bore it! Although Cartier could see nothing wrong and all for the best in what was being done this day; it was for his cause, therefore good. A differing viewpoint, no more.

Valmont halted abruptly. He did not see any figures following him, but he caught sight of something midstream of the turgid water, among the ice fragments. It was a canoe that had come from the island and was making now for this shore. A small craft with a single occupant, paddling hard—some lone redskin coming to the feast.

He passed through a thick patch of young birch, came out on the ice-rimmed shore, and looked at the canoe. The current was sweeping it fast downstream; the single paddler was working hard. It would come ashore, Valmont saw, just about where he stood. He wore his sword, not from any thought of danger, but as his

badge of rank. He loosened the blade in the scabbard, bared it, advanced to the rim of ice and pricked at it with the long rapier to test it ahead of his steps. That lone paddler was in distress, was making him a sign for help. . . . A cry burst from him, a gulping cry of incredulity, of recognition.

A squaw, an Indian woman—a girl in tatters, wounded, thinned by privations and at the point of exhaustion—by heaven, it was Bright Feather! He stared, open-mouthed, as the canoe came in close. A last spurt of effort, and she fell forward in the canoe—but the frail craft had arrived.

Valmont dropped his sword and stepped out. He caught the canoe and dragged it up, eager words on his lips.

BRIGHT FEATHER indeed! She rose, panting weakly; he caught her in his arms and held her emaciated body against him. Her hands clung to him; laughter and tears mingled in her face as she looked up at him. All her heart was in her eyes.

"You! It is you!" came her hurried words. He held her closer, babbling incoherent things, trying to remember Huron words that evaded him.

"But how, how?" he cried. "They said you were killed—taken as a slave—"

She laughed faintly, and spoke in mingled sign-language and words.

"Yes. I escaped before we reached the Iroquois country. I have been wandering, hiding, keeping away from them. At last I got back here, found a canoe and crossed to the island, then got here. . . . I was afraid, afraid! But now, not afraid—"

She drooped suddenly, escaped from his arms, slid down in complete collapse at his feet, but she was still smiling. Valmont leaned over and touched her wrist; yes, she was all right, it was nothing but fatigue and reaction—

"A very touching scene, monsieur," came a mocking voice. "And, no doubt, gold and diamonds to fill your pocket, eh? Why, it's the redskin wench! Your wench, Gros Michel!"

There was a burst of laughter. Valmont turned slowly and saw them there—Laroux, long rapier bared, a fleeing smile on his lips, Gros Michel leaning forward to peer at the girl, knife in hand, lusty red-bearded features a-grin.

Upon Valmont burst a spasm of such fury as he had never known in his life. He cried out something, he knew not what; upon his anger Laroux broke in, with a step forward.

"Come, monsieur! Caught in the act. You knew where to get the diamonds, eh? And how. Not a move, now! You're going back with us to the captain, you and your dusky paramour—"

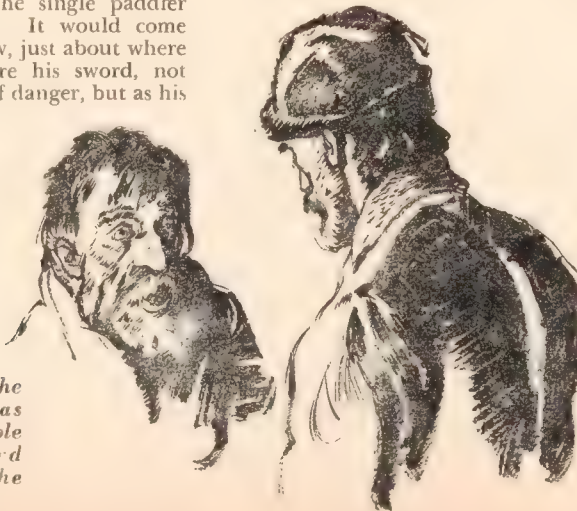
As he spoke, Laroux moved to set foot on Valmont's blade; but there Valmont was ahead of him with a swooping clutch that caught the hilt. The vicomte slashed down, striking him across the face; the cutting edge bloodied his cheeks—but he had the weapon and was staggering out of reach.

Staggering straight into the rush of Gros Michel, blindly striking the knife-lunge aside as it drove for him. A lucky chance, this; the thin sword-blade, made for cutting rather than for thrusting, reached its mark. The tip of it, in this blind desperate parry, somehow went home—through red beard and red throat.

Gros Michel paused there, rocking on his feet and clutching at himself. But, from one side, Laroux was uncoiling a deadly lunge. Valmont, aware of it in time, faced about and caught it on his own blade. Here were no tricks of fence, a science not yet invented; in its place was a furious cut and thrust of less skill than ferocity. Valmont was in the grip of a terrific fury. The vicomte, beating at him, lunging, thrusting, driving him back, was suddenly caught up in this fury as Valmont attacked him in turn. He gave ground, intent upon the thin gray blade in Valmont's hand. That blade was for his life, and he knew it.

His own murderous blast was spent. Alarm grew in his watchful eyes and passed into slow terror and a vicious, deadly hatred. Those eyes of his flickered for an instant to the woman's huddled figure; Valmont caught the flicker but not the cunning intent. Suddenly, swift as light, Laroux feinted as though to slash down at the girl.

A cry burst from Valmont. He flung out his blade to meet the slash—but, instead, Laroux was lunging for him. Lunging, and had him; the long rapier was driving in straight to the heart, with no possible avoidance—but as he lunged, Laroux slipped on



"We'll carry off the old chief and as many of his people as we can crowd aboard," said the master pilot.

a patch of ice. The lunge fell short, not so short but that the point slashed Valmont across the chest—but short of death.

And there was Laroux fallen on one knee, looking up frantically for the blow that would end him. He shrank, with death in his eyes, as Valmont's rapier swept down. The blow caught his sword and sent it out of his hand, slithering over the ice-edge into the water. He still poised there on one knee, helpless, frantic terror bubbling on his lips and widening his staring eyes.

That stricken face awaiting the death-thrust checked Valmont suddenly in one hot breath. Then he leaned forward; the gray steel flickered forth in his hand, and the flat of it struck the vicomte across the face. A cry burst from him.

"Don't yap before you're hurt, mongrel," panted Valmont in contempt. "Quick! Up for it! Run! Back where you belong—to France!"

Laroux slid and scrambled to his feet. He stumbled over the body of Gros Michel, now fallen and stretched out flat in death, then went bursting through the green-fledged birch and away out of sight.

Jean Valmont sheathed his long rapier and gulped cold air into his lungs. He dropped a glance at Gros Michel, knelt, and took knife, firebag and pouch from the dead man, tossing them into the canoe. Standing up again he wiped the blood from his cheek, and his eyes went out to the promontory thrusting into the river.

"Aye, to France where you belong!" he said. "You and all like you! As for me, I'll wait no longer for what life can give me and has given me—"

He lifted the wasted shape of Bright Feather and laid her gently in the canoe, took up the paddle, lifted the canoe across the ice and into the water, and with some difficulty got into the frail craft and balanced himself. Downstream a little way, safe from any pursuit, with the arms of all Canada waiting to enfold and hide and hold them securely, together—

AS for Jacques Cartier, he sailed back to St. Malo and his great project, but long years passed ere he saw Canada again. The redskins he carried off came back home never, and his lordly dream ended in two bits of speech. One was the name that came to be given to glittering mica in the river sands: Fools' Gold. The other, a bitter French proverb of the time: False as diamonds from Canada!

And yet the Lilies came back to the New World long after, borne by sturdy, honest folk who built up in their lives the ideals of their fluttering flag, and left the high nobility of those flowers of heaven a heritage unsullied to their children.

The ANCHORED ISLAND

In this twice-told story of the Free Lances in Diplomacy, Mr. New forecast current schemes for airplane "stepping-stones" across the oceans.

by Clarence Herbert New

TREVOR HALL, the beautiful home estate of the Earl and Countess of Dyvnaint, lies for a mile and a half along the top of Scabbacombe Cliffs, over four hundred feet above the waters of the English Channel, in south Devon. In the heart of the thick forest which covers two-thirds of the property there are machine-shops, laboratories, airplane hangars and a powerful radio-beam station. And because many of His Lordship's experiments are undertaken for the British Government, the estate has the status of a royal dockyard or army fortification, in the neighborhood of which photography or espionage of any sort is strictly taboo.

Opposite the Hall on the cliff-brow is a bungalow with wide verandas, and going down through the rock from its landward wall is an elevator-shaft communicating with a series of dressing-rooms and storage space cut out of the solid cliff eighty feet above the narrow beach. From these rooms a small steel-truss bridge extends out over the water to a point well outside of low-water mark, where an electric lift goes down to a dock built upon iron piping in a depth of fifty feet. . . .

This narrative begins, properly, last fall when Earl Trevor, his friend Earl Lammerford and his master mechanic Harry Archer took down in the lifts with them a hollow tin float four feet long, two feet wide and six inches deep along the edges, with a V-shaped bottom that went down to a keel two feet below the surface—together with a basketful of lead-lines and weights. Coming out of the good-sized dock-house into which the lift had dropped them, they carried the float and basket down a gangplank in the center of the dock—which was U-shaped, with a gate-protected opening on the north side—to a speed-boat which was moored alongside the landing-float with two other small craft. When the dock-keeper had opened the gate for

them, the speed-cruiser shot out into a choppy sea and anchored a thousand feet away. Half a mile out beyond the dock there was a line of buoys with red flags extending the full length of the estate.

When the little cruiser was anchored, the men looked up and down the coast-line with their glasses, spotting a few craft out in the Channel but nothing else near them except a somewhat larger speed-cruiser which appeared to be trolling, a mile out. So, after hooking on forty-foot lead-lines to each of its corners, they lowered the float over the side and began paying out the weighted lines, one after the other, with ten pounds at the end of each. This combined weight, when the float got the full drag of it, pulled it down three inches in the water. Keeping the cruiser on the weather side of it, thirty feet away, they began watching the action of the float.

"My word, Lammey! Did you see that? Outer edge entirely clear of the water, inner edge submerged—not more than a five-degree slope on the top! Fancy we must be rather close to the right balance between depth, weight and buoyancy. But—I say! What the devil—"

The bigger launch, a mile out, was heading toward them at a thirty-mile gait, casting great fans of spray.

"Harry! Cast that machine-gun loose in the bow and spray a few bullets each side of them!" said Trevor. "They can see that naval ensign on the outer buoy as well as we can. It's no novelty havin' some one determined to spy on us, but it's dev'lish annoyin'! We've been too damned polite, so far—an' it hasn't any effect."

The men on the launch paid no attention to the first splashes of bullets around them, but when they began ripping the awning canvas and chipping splinters off the woodwork, they stopped their motor and swerved off a bit. One of them caught up a big megaphone and shouted:

"What the devil do you mean by firing upon defenseless people? We'll come back here with an officer in a little while and see what you've got to say about it!"

"Get outside of those buoys—and stay out! You can see that naval ensign as clearly as anyone else can! If you come inside again, we'll riddle you!"

Another spray of bullets alongside was a sufficient hint to start up their motor. The launch went slowly off like a dog with his tail between his legs—the men on board cursing audibly as they set a course toward the boat-yard at Torquay, where they'd hired the launch.

WHILE they were stopping the cruiser, Earl Trevor pulled the float as close as he dared under lee of his own craft. The weights suspended from it, which of course didn't show at all above water, made a pretty heavy drag and prevented its being slammed against the cruiser when it was fairly close. But just then, a familiar drone made them look toward the north, where a plane was approaching in the distance, flying pretty low. Archer grabbed up a tarpaulin which was folded on the cabin skylight and threw it over the float before the approaching plane got near enough to see what it was with a glass. The three grinned at each other—and sat down to light their pipes.

"Those bounders are a blasted nuisance, but they'll not last long after our boys up at the hangars hear 'em. Somebody'll be out with a combat-plane in a minute or so. . . . Ah! There he comes now!"

On the three land-sides of the estate ground-signs in six-foot letters, picked out with white-painted cobbles, read:

NO FLYING PERMITTED OVER
THIS ENCLOSURE
R. N. R.

The intruding plane was approaching from somewhere in the northwest, possibly from the moors at the top-end of Cornwall, perhaps from some steamer at the mouth of Bristol Channel. From its build and markings, it belonged somewhere on the Continent. But the pilot must have seen at least two of the warning signs before he crossed over the wall and flew diagonally across the estate. He wasn't over the water before the combat-plane was climbing above him. Inside of the next minute, machine-gun bullets began ripping through the plane-cloth rather close to the cockpit. Looking up and back, the pilot saw the other plane—saw the man at the machine-gun motioning with his hand to the eastward and pointing to the line of floats off-shore. When the intruding pilot paid no attention to this, he was warned by another hail of bullets

which chipped the fuselage—there wasn't any doubt whatever that the next lot would be fired squarely into the cockpit. As the air in that particular spot was getting too hot, the intruder banked and swerved off to the east with the combat-plane still policing him. . . .

After this, Trevor ran back to his tin float, retrieved the tarpaulin, cast a line over the float and hauled it near enough to hang three pounds more weight to the end of each corner line, which lowered the float another inch in the water and left but two inches above the surface. They could have calibrated a Plimsoll-mark on its six-inch edge with a little close figuring—it was simply a problem in algebra to establish the ratio between under-water-weight and buoyancy. This time the choppy waves when they heaved up the float from trough to crest, didn't tilt it more than two degrees on the top surface—at least a quarter of the outside edge being entirely out of water while the edge next to the wave was under water for a distance of four inches toward the middle. To put it in another way, the even distribution of weight so far below the heavier surface of the water, in proportion to the square-inch area of the deck or top of the float, stabilized its floating position so thoroughly that the different angle of the heaving waves did not materially affect the level of its deck—the V-shaped bottom having a tendency to shunt off the lifting force on the under side.

After making a number of tests with varying weights, they hauled in their float and returned to the Hall. There from the radio- and telephone-room next to his own private suite, Trevor called up a department chief at the Admiralty in Whitehall, who had charge of radio-development:

"Are you there, Jennifer? Aye—Trevor of Dyvnaint, speakin'. You chaps were to have our patented radio-beacon installed upon one of the fast light cruisers, so as to make a test with me, as soon as possible. Regular sea-test, you understand—Western Ocean conditions—an' find out whether we can successfully chase her with my deep-sea yacht, in spite of any dodgin' or tricks—run her down, guided only by the beacon, which she's to keep in operation until we come up or communicate."

"Quite so, Your Lordship. The beacon has been installed upon the *Penelope*—second class, Commander Welling, now lying off Cardiff. They have been testing it all the morning—seems to be working perfectly. Cruiser is under your orders any moment you're ready."

"What'll she do—under forced draught?"

"Thirty-five—along the measured mile in the Mersey. Possibly a knot

or two better under favorable conditions."

"My boat, the *Ranee Sylvia*, was formerly rated in Lloyd's 'Yacht Register' as a good steady thirty-two, but she was overhauled after the war, fitted with oil-burners an' high-pressure boilers, so that we've now a few knots in reserve, which should make it about an even thing with the *Penelope*. Very good. Will you kindly order her to leave at once, proceedin' due south-west? My boat is lyin' in Salcombe Harbor. We'll be aboard of her—pullin' out in possibly three or four hours. That'll fetch the *Penelope* about off Land's End when we're startin'—sixty or eighty miles out an' a hundred an' fifty from us. I'll talk with her directly we clear Bolt Head—an' then the chase will be on."

"I say, Your Lordship! What do you figure as the range of your radio-beacon?"

"One mile to six thousand, dependin' upon which of several short-waves is used. That's to say, a boat off Rio Janeiro would get it distinctly from anywhere in these waters an' head directly up through the South, Middle an' North Atlantic until she struck the beacon."

"But—wait a bit! She'd be gettin' a lot of shore beacons on the way up, some of 'em on the same waves?"

"Aye, but with different individual signals. Most of the shore beacons are a series of dashes to the left an' dots to the right—T's and E's. Just at present we're using A's and B's. Every beacon has a registered signal, as you know. Well, d'ye see—the master down off Rio would only need to shift his dials until our signal came in—then set his radio-compass an' steer directly for 'em."

AT dinner that evening—on the *Ranee Sylvia*—the two earls, with Archer and the Countess Nan, were laughingly pitting their intelligence against that of Commander Welling of the *Penelope*, who was becoming interested in this sea-game of hare and hound. His only disadvantage was that he had to keep his radio-beacon going steadily every five seconds. On the other hand, he fancied he had a little the edge on speed and after crossing the line between Land's End and Cape Clear, he was not restricted as to his course; he might go north, west or south, or steam in a great circle. If the *Ranee Sylvia* overhauled him, he lost, and had to stand the best dinner his cruiser could put up. If he kept her out of sight forty-eight hours, he won, and would dine with his lieutenants and ensigns on the *Ranee*. It seemed like a sporting proposition.

After dinner they gathered round Trevor's desk in the forward star-board corner of the big saloon. In the corner itself was a brass binnacle

with a Kelvin compass. Directly over it a steel shaft with an auger-handle at the lower end of it came down through a sleeve in the overhead deck-plating, and attached to that sleeve was an eighteen-inch movable compass-card of sheet-iron, painted white. On a ledge projecting from the bulkhead at the right of the desk was a twelve-tube receiving-set with a short-wave set alongside of it. On the bulkhead itself hung a three-foot cone. On the desk stood a powerful microphone. Behind the Earl's swivel-chair, on the outside bulkhead, was a switchboard connecting with every room and space on the yacht—also the long- and short-wave transmitting-sets, so that, sitting at his desk, with chart-drawers underneath the cushioned transom-seat which ran along under the ports at his left, he was in control of all communications to, from and inside the yacht, and could navigate her without getting out of his chair. In the wheel-house, laboratory, machine-shop and engine-room the phone-receivers were supplemented with eighteen-inch cones upon the bulkheads, and microphones, so that he could talk with his officers and crew without holding a receiver to his ear. The wireless-room was in the after end of the deck-house directly over his desk, and the shaft of the radio-compass passed up through it.

Switching on the short-wave set, when they were seated around him, a tapping of A's and B's came loudly from the cone every five seconds. Reaching up over his desk, Trevor set the movable compass-card so that it exactly calibrated with the Kelvin compass in the binnacle, on the "lubber's-mark." Twisting the auger-handle at the end of the radio-compass shaft back and forth, when the signals came in again, he found that they were strongest at exactly 180 degrees, or due south.

For the next three hours, the radio-compass showed the *Penelope* holding her steady course due south, while the *Ranee* headed southwest—and the two boats getting farther apart with every mile they steamed. By that time the cruiser had made a hundred miles of southing. It was part of the rules that, while His Lordship called her as he was leaving port to indicate that the test was on, neither was allowed to call the other afterward unless one of them gave it up; consequently, Commander Welling could only guess where his pursuer might be. And he guessed wrong. When he swung around due west and then a bit north of that, he was heading on a course which must bring the two boats together in a few hours. Among other things, he was to flash his number once an hour through the night with his Ardois lights on the foremast.

At three in the morning, the *Ranee Sylvia*—knowing by the power of the

signals that the two craft were rapidly approaching—made out the *Penelope's* Ardois lights on the horizon. Thinking it only fair, now, to give the Commander a sporting race to close in or avoid it, Trevor had one of his quarter-masters flash his own number. Then he called Welling on the short-wave radiophone-set:

"Are you there, Welling? Pleased to see your lights!"

"I say, Your Lordship! We've been doin' a steady thirty-three—takin' a deal of water aboard—an' we must have had a good hundred an' fifty the start of you. If you've made that up since one in the afternoon, yesterday, your boat's a holy wonder!"

"It wasn't the speed, Welling—you've been runnin' around in circles, while we've been respectably keepin' a straight course, though we've done between thirty-two an' thirty-five, according to the way we were heading. But the test has been a success—absolutely! No craft afloat, with one of those radio-beacons operatin' on her, could escape unless she was a lot faster than the pursuin' boat, because every trick of dodgin' she tried would be known the minute she did it. I'll guarantee to hit any boat on deep water, large or small, with one of our beacons on her. The thing didn't miss a single beat, an' it was so noticeably louder when the compass-loop was pointin' your way that they synchronized as I hoped they would in actual practice. I'm under obligations to you an' Admiral Jennifer for the assistance you've given me. If you care to see how good our beacon really is, we'll be the hare and you can be bound on the way back—we'll keep our beacon operatin' for the next twelve hours, shiftin' our course two or three times so you can check up. . . . Er—about that dinner: If you'll drop anchor in Salcombe Harbor next Friday afternoon, we'll come aboard of you an' eat it. Then you an' your officers run up to the Hall with us an' spend the week-end—I fancy we've a number of things which might int'rest you. . . . Agreed?"

WHEN Countess Nan appeared at breakfast, she found that they were running up St. George's Channel instead of for Salcombe—the *Ranee's* home port.

"Where are you taking me, George? We've no guests due immediately, that I can recollect, but I'm busy with a number of things at home."

"Do you good to rest a bit—you work too much. We've tested the beacon for airplane use—though Welling an' the navy people have no suspicion of that; an' now we're proceeding with that float we tried out the other morning when those spies were determined to get a look-see."

"Fancy I don't quite get the practical application of that float—yet. I

know you demonstrated to your satisfaction that any sort of a floating object can be kept upon more or less of a level in a heavy sea. But just what have you in mind?"

"A practical trans-oceanic air service. You've seen the newspaper articles, of course, on the scheme this chap has for building a string of islands across the Atlantic so that planes may land on them for repairs or refueling? Eh? Well, that fellow has a good idea by the tail, but as far as he's gone, he's not worked out a scheme which is in the least practical. But I fancy I have! First place, as we demonstrated, you can't keep that platform or deck anywhere near level in a heavy sea without a stabilizing weight below it at least far enough down to be in absolutely motionless water—or rather water not in the least affected by surface motion. He proposes to build his islands upon pontoons which must be sixty or eighty feet down to get away from surface movement. Well, in what shipyard on this round globe can you launch a big deck fifteen hundred feet long with any such depth of structure under it? Then—he proposes anchoring those islands of his to the ocean floor. No reason under the sun for doin' that, by the way! Certainly nothing smaller than three-inch steel cables would begin to hold 'em! And the ocean floor across the Atlantic is from three to five miles straight down—from one thousand to more than three thousand fathoms. Just figure the approximate weight of six or eight three-inch steel cables, each three or four miles long, with anchors heavy enough to hold 'em, and tell me how long a fifteen-hundred-foot float is going to stay above water with that weight hanging from it—say thirty pounds to the foot, for the cables? A good two thousand tons dead-weight for six cables an' anchors. You can float that weight on the surface in a good-sized steamer, but when you've got Western Ocean billows a mile long an' two thousand feet between crests, heaving that long float against that weight, something's going to let go."

"I suppose any such floating islands would have to be held in a fixed spot somehow—wouldn't they?"

"Nan, my dear! I'll admit as a sop to your argum't that, with navigation back where it was five-an'-twenty years ago, they would have to be rooted in some way to a fixed latitude an' longitude. But this beacon experiment we've just tested out does away with all that. Give those floatin' islands a bit of motive-power, equip 'em with our radio-beacons—an' we don't give a damn how much they drift, temporarily, because they can be navigated back to their regular position in two or three hours at the most—an' any plane can hit 'em, wherever they are, on the face of the sea! Do you get it?"

"Oh—I say! That's one-up for you, old boy! Then the only two requirements to make that chap's floating-island proposition really practical are these two you've been testing out? What? The means of stabilizing a fairly level deck from which any plane can land or take off—and the beacon to locate 'em, unerringly, at any time of day or night whether they're actually on their proper peg-post or not? Two hundred miles in one direction or another is nothing to an aviator—an hour-and-a-half run at the outside. Good work! And you're running up to the Clyde to have some islands built, are you?"

"That's the idea, exactly—now that we know just where we're at. Two of 'em as a starter—twelve or fifteen hundred feet long—hundred an' thirty feet wide—V-shaped under water—triple-screws an' Diesel motors. Lammy's squanderin' his money on one, an' I'm building the other. When both are working successfully, it's a simple enough matter to promote a comp'ny an' sell 'em to it. But we've so beastly much money that we'd never miss the price even if we have to junk 'em."

"What will they probably cost?"

"Well—if it's over a hundred an' fifty thousand, sterling, for each, we'll build 'em ourselves. All we need is a V-shaped hull with motors, fuel-tanks, storage space, staterooms for crew and aviators, machine-shop in the 'tween-decks, anchors an' cables for the under-water weight."

SIX months later, in closely housed gantrys on a seldom-visited stretch of bank near the mouth of the Clyde, the last rivets were being driven in two of the queerest hulls ever put together in that ship-building river. The day they were launched—with a mere sprinkling of people to see it done, so well had the date been kept secret—a rough wooden box was built over the decks from end to end. No outsider got his nose into that box during the additional three months during which the motors and internal fittings were being installed. A good deal of this work had been done before the launching—the less weighty part—so that nine months after the keels had been laid, the still boxed-in monstrosities started down St. George's Channel at a leisurely gait and disappeared in that No Man's Land of the North Atlantic which lies in the bald-spot between the steamer-lanes.

The secret as to the ownership of the two mysterious hulls had been well kept. And when the ugly Noah's arks went off under their own power, the partners, with the senior's private secretary and their chief clerk, were the only persons in Glasgow who knew who were paying for the job—and even they had no clear idea as to what the big floats were to be used for, or where.

There was one man who had been hanging about, off and on, from the time the keels were laid. He tried a dozen schemes to get inside the enclosure. In any other country but Scotland, he would have succeeded. But—"Whin a Scot says nae, he aye means nae—he'll no' argue wi' ye!" Haupt was one of the scattering few who saw the launching—from a boat in the river, which was hustled so far up by the firm's boatmen who were keeping the river clear that he only got a fleeting glimpse some distance away. He dropped down alongside the hulls when they were in the water, but never got aboard—he was quickly hauled out by the river-patrol.

When the "arks" had disappeared, Haupt took the night train for London. Next afternoon he called at the very respectable house, in a very respectable street, of Dr. Karl Earhardt—a nerve-specialist who was becoming rather famous. The doctor received no patients in the afternoon. Those who called by appointment were employees of one sort or another, though supposed to be special patients who paid rather stiff fees. When Haupt entered the private office and closed the door, he stood at attention—waiting for the Doctor to speak.

"Well, animal!" exclaimed the supposed physician, in a Continental language. "What have you to tell me—from Glasgow?"

"Nothing but inference and theory, Excellency. That gantry-enclosure and the boxes on those hulls were the only places in all my life that I couldn't get into! I have told you, Excellency, of the various ways I have tried. In all the other yards, I've not done so badly!"

"And who are you that you should talk about doing well or badly?"

"I—I do my best, Excellency; if it is not satisfactory—well—I put a bullet through my head."

"And then perhaps it is a month—two months—before I get another animal who would not make even more mistakes than you! You will not plop the bullet until I say! I do not permit! Look you: It is necessary that we should control the world commerce—that is self-evident. But these English—they work all the time in very underhanded way to accomplish the same thing for themselves. There is somebody here in this country who is like the big whale—not the small flappers which squirt the water on the surface, but the old grandfather whale way down deep who make everything else move when he moves. Haupt, I suspect this Earl Trevor and his friends, for many years. He has wide commercial interests, he is millionaire so many times that the word does not mean anything to him or his most intimate friends; he was in the Cabinet—in fact, I think he ran the Cabinet.

Now he is out, he must have a hobby to occupy his time. He experiments for the Government in radio, chemistry and aerial navigation.

"Now—those hulls in Glasgow? We do not know who is building them; we cannot learn. Perhaps the Government. Perhaps this Trevor and his friends for the Government. It is more likely he than anyone else I can think of. For what he builds them, we do not know—I could guess for some kind of airplane-carrier, but they cannot be fast enough for that with any such length and bulk. Anyhow—we must watch everything doing over here until we find out what for, and then—we get busy! You understand? You will be discreet—you must be efficient, or I flay the skin off you! Here is money! Go!"

BACK at Trevor Hall on that same day, they were completing in one of the hangars a new type of amphibian plane which would carry twelve passengers with mail and luggage, be constantly in communication with its airdromes by radio-telephone, be navigated almost entirely by radio-beacon, carry enough fuel for a two-thousand-mile flight with full load, or three thousand miles with half-load. Two of the admirals were down for the week-end to inspect it with His Lordship, and admitted that it was the most practical, businesslike ship they had yet seen. But the radio-telephoning they didn't quite understand.

"How much range does Your Lordship expect to get with the voice over the equipment we see here in this cabin? Is this all of it?"

"Aye—an' I've got the total weight down to a hundred an' eighty pounds. Most planes run their motor-generator by a wind-fan outside of the fuselage, which slightly retards the speed of the plane. I run it by storage battery while actually broadcasting, but when not transmitting I can be recharging the battery with the outside fan or stop it if I don't really need the juice. Then if the motors fail and you have to land, the wireless is still good for some hours' use from the battery alone. We don't expect to need much over three thousand miles range—but using the six short-waves upon which we've been experimenting, we get over five thousand, night an' day."

"My word! I'd not have believed that possible! But why telephone instead of using code—which is lighter and cheaper?"

"Altogether too slow for an airplane traveling nearly three miles a minute! A pilot may have a lot of instructions to give between the time his motor fails an' the moment he hits ground or water."

"An' what particular use do you put these two loops to, if one may ask? I notice you run your aerial back

from a short streamline pole to the rudder-socket."

"Hmph! That's the time you caught me, Admiral! Something the boys have been rigging up, I fancy. What are they for, Harry?"

Archer was grinning delightedly.

"Oh, that's just a bit of surprise. Her Ladyship worked out for you. She said you'd been ritzy about your old radio-beacon ever since that test with the *Penelope*, so she came down from the Hall a few evenings and worked this out all by herself—calls it a 'radio-beacon detector.' An'—no joking. Your Lordship—we fancy she's put it all over you! It's really the slickest contraption we've yet seen! I can diagram it on paper better than I can show you from anything there is to see—it's as simple as a hairpin fish-hook. You notice the two loops, one at each side of the cockpit, locked in position—edges pointing fifteen degrees to the right and to the left of the ship's longitudinal axis? Below them, these two little black boxes with single dial and control-knob—short-wave sets. The right-hand one is tuned to thirty-five meters—the left one, forty-five meters. Head-phones connect with both at the same time. The radio-beacon, wherever it happens to be, is transmitting A's on thirty-five meters—B's, on forty-five. Well—you catch it, don't you? Swing your plane a little off your true course to the right, and your B-loop on the left comes directly in line with the beacon—while the A-loop on the right is fetched broadside to the beacon and doesn't bring in anything at all. The B-loop, being tuned to forty-five meters, is catching the B's from the beacon on the same wave. You know that if you were getting A's from the beacon on your right side-loop, the beacon would be on that side. As you're getting nothing but B's, the beacon must be on your left. Consequently, you are steering to right of the beacon.

To get back onto it again, you must shift your rudder to port and steer left until you begin to get A's through your head-phones—then shift a little to the right, again, and you're dead-on the beacon—simply can't miss it! Of course these fixed loops accomplish much the same result as your radio-compass—loosen the nut and you can use them as a compass. But they do it automatically, without any calculating—no looking at the chart, no synchronizing a compass-card—practically no weight to speak of—not ten pounds altogether, if you rob a trickle of juice from the main storage-battery. As long as your old radio-beacon is working, you can nail it from any distance, straight as a homing pigeon!"

"By Jove, Harry, that's one of the cleverest things I ever saw worked out! But that dead-side loop won't be altogether dead—will it?"

"If you're using a lot of power, you may get a faint murmur from it, but it'll be a fade-out compared with the strength of signal from the other loop, just as a big radio-compass loop is nothing but a murmur on the flat side. With the vibration of the plane, I doubt if you hear anything at all from the dead loop. With the power slightly cut down, I know you won't!"

"Fancy we'll have to give the Countess a party for this stunt! What?"

"She's been hinting it'll run to rather more than that, sir—says she's going to pilot the plane as soon as the bearings are smoothed down a bit and the beacons are working."

"Hmph! Joke of it is, we'd have one deuce of a job stoppin' her! Only thing we can do, I fancy, is get the ship in first-class running order before she tries it."

THAT evening, in the radio-room at the Hall, they got the first beats of the radio-beacon on one of the big floats—which was then in the position it was to occupy for some months at least: Lon. 13-30 W.—Lat. 47 N. The other float was just about reaching the spot in the North Atlantic where she was to remain indefinitely: Lon. 19 W.—Lat. 43-30 N. Each of these positions was from one hundred to five hundred miles from the regular steamer-tracks to Europe. When the regularity of the beat indicated that the float had settled down to business with all of her radio equipment in working order, His Lordship switched in a short-wave telephone-transmitter on fifty-six meters and commenced calling: "GLOX—GLOX—GLOX"—the short-wave letters which had been assigned to it; and in a moment, he got an acknowledgment. The master in command of the float was enthusiastic over the appearance and performance of his odd-looking craft, now that all the wooden boxing had been removed. He said that with his three screws and the Diesel motors he had been able to maintain an average of nearly sixteen knots—with the long cables and anchors hauled up into the hull, of course—and had done over twelve in a pretty heavy sea. Two days' observations with a pretty heavy sea running showed the drift to be about a quarter of a knot an hour, with the anchors twelve hundred feet below the deck-level at the end of their chain-cables. He was under the impression that with a fairly smooth sea the drift wouldn't amount to half a knot in a day; it would not be necessary to turn his screws over more than half an hour each day to keep exactly on his position. As for his four auxiliary planes, he said that even in the heaviest sea the angle of slope from a dead-level on deck hadn't been more than three per cent—that the planes had taken off from and

landed on the deck without a single mishap.

His Lordship had been a little doubtful about the obstruction offered to planes in the air by the big squat ventilating-funnel, conning tower and aërials, but Manning explained that there could be no risk as long as the wind was not blowing directly toward them. This risk he obviated by keeping the float constantly bow and stern to the wind. Hauling up his anchors for a few moments, he reversed two of his screws and turning the other ahead—then dropped his anchors when he was heading into the wind. It took some hours to swing off again—usually the wind shifted first. They had speculated somewhat upon how much trouble the lift of the whole float when riding the big deep-sea billows was going to make in landing a plane on the deck—but had found in actual practice that the twenty or thirty feet of rise between trough and crest was so much slower than the plane's landing speed that the pilots had been able to gauge it successfully. Their greatest anxiety had been from the flooding of the deck when the seas were shorter and choppy. But the long space had been paved with rough tiling which absolutely prevented any skidding of the rubber tires when landing—and running through a few inches of wash was all in the day's work for any plane.

Before Manning signed off, he reported a close investigation of them by what looked like a fast yacht of possibly twelve hundred tons—painted black, flying no flags of any description. After circling about the float twice and examining her with glasses from their bridge, they had steamed away in a northeasterly direction, talking by wireless as they went, with some W/T Station on the Continent, and in a language which Manning didn't recognize. It appeared evident that some other government or organization was observing their operations closely, and undoubtedly would be out to look at them again in that same general neighborhood. After repeating this to the others, His Lordship switched off and lighted a fresh cigar.

"I anticipated sabotage from some of those bounders on the Continent as soon as they found out what we were up to—and armed each of those scout-planes connected with the floats with two machine-guns, also equipm't for refueling in the air if necessary. But it looks to me as though machine-guns'll not be enough! I fancy their first attempt at interference will be from a bombing-plane—which, with luck, might sink the float with high-explosive an' get back to land without having its identity discovered. We'll just send down a couple of trimotored bombing-planes for each float. At the

least sign of unlimbering a gun in the vicinity of our floats, we sink 'em, taking photographs of 'em first—telephoto-lens—just as proof that we were justified. . . . Harry—you've two bombers down there in the hangars which can start within an hour or so. Get them off, will you?"

DURING the next two days they made test-flights with the new amphibian plane until it was pronounced in perfect condition for a trans-Atlantic flight. After dinner on the second evening, it was run out over the cliff-brow with Countess Nan at the controls—Harry Archer looking after motors and equipment, and the two earls and two admirals as passengers in the comfortable cabin chairs. The cabin was very well insulated from the noise of the three big motors, though some of it got in through two windows of armor-glass which had been partly opened for ventilation. But conversation was much easier than it would have been in a subway train, at that. The admirals had not grasped from anything which had yet been said, just what sort of air service His Lordship and his friends had in mind, and they now wished to know if this might be explained to them. He drew from a locker at one side of the cabin a radio-beacon and W/T chart of the Atlantic, and spread it out upon a folding-table between the chairs.

"Eighteen months ago, gentlemen, the question came up at a Cabinet meeting as to how far we were from established air-mail and passenger service across the Atlantic. I tried to impress upon the other ministers that when such service is in operation it must be along just one course—which never will be the northern one via Newfoundland. Told 'em I had already formed a syndicate, got a concession from the Portuguese government, bought up the only four practical areas for landing-fields in the Azores, and equipped them for such purpose—and under the rose, fortified them sufficiently for protection. A German syndicate wasn't more than two jumps behind me, at that—but I beat them all along the line from Lisbon to Horta. Well, the ministers couldn't see the southern route at all—admitted the danger of ice, snow and westerly gales up north, but said the Azores route was much too far—though there isn't more than four hundred miles difference between the two—to New York. I bet five thousand pounds that I'd fly over an' back that way without mishap—my landing-field on Pico, across the strait from Horta, was already equipped. They took me up. I left Trevor Hall on Monday morning, was in New York an' Washington a day—and walked into the Cabinet room at Downing Street the following Friday afternoon.

"Well—I learned a good bit on that trip. I made it—am perfectly confident of doin' it again with a plane I'm sure is in proper condition. But in the present stage of airplane, an' more particularly pilot developm't, the service quite probably could not be dependable. We've been working upon the problem of how to make it more so. Then along comes this chap with his scheme for anchored landing-islands in mid-ocean. He's on the track of the right idea—but his proposition, so far, isn't practical at all. We borrowed from it—an' have worked out something which is entirely practical. From Plymouth to Horta is twelve hundred sixty-eight sea miles—perfectly all right for any of our lot from Trevor Hall, but not a dependable flight over water in the teeth of an ocean gale with average pilots. So I'm splitting that distance up into three flights of about four hundred an' twenty miles, each. If a pilot can't make that in most any old weather, he'd better keep an instructor with him when flying. The Countess' beacon detector makes it impossible to miss any of the floats—you fly to them straight as an arrow—and if you don't like to risk landing on 'em, one of their planes comes up an' refuels you as you fly. If your motor goes phut, they come out an' rescue you. From Horta to New York is two thousand ninety-four miles. Three floats cuts it down to five-hundred-an'-twenty-five-mile hops. We're trying out the Azores flight until we do it as dependably as clock-work. Then we'll have those other floats ready and open up the whole service. We're by long odds the first in the field of commercial trans-oceanic flying—and that's going to be of immense advantage to every corner of the Empire. But we shall have to fight for it and stand some losses before we're through!"

The amphibian was good for 160 miles an hour if crowded, but about a hundred was a more economical speed. So they should be within a mile or two of "GLOX" before two o'clock in the morning. There was no chance of their missing her—the old beacon was rapping away as steadily as the heart-beat of a healthy person. At midnight, after he had picked up a lot of ship-gossip on six hundred meters, Lammerford called the float on fifty-six and got the night-operator at once. He said that another plane, possibly two hundred miles behind them, had been talking with some Continental station on 39.7 meters in a foreign language. . . . After telling him that they should be on the float in an hour and a half and that it might be well to have two combat-planes in the air within a few minutes, Lammerford switched to 39.7—kept shoving the power up and down for ten minutes without any results—

though stations were talking a few points on either side. Suddenly a call came for AJXY, and a transmitter close to the plane replied in French:

"Have you reason to believe A-B signals are some sort of beacon on that plane-carrier?"

"They are in direction carrier was last seen, Excellency. Radio-compass checks up. Consider that source probable."

"How far are you from plane-carrier?"

"Less than 500 kilometers from position logged by yacht, Excellency."

"Fly toward supposed beacon. If plane-carrier is located before daylight, sink it. Make no attempt in daytime. There must be no evidence. With no evidence left about, anyone may sink a boat on the high seas and get away with it."

Lammerford whistled.

"What's up, Lammy?" asked Trevor.

"That damned scoundrel behind us has just got orders to sink our float before daylight if he can locate it—and he thinks A-B beacon must be on it. Wait till I call up Manning!"

The float master was at the "mike" in less than five minutes.

"I say, Manning! Switch off your beacon at once! We'll manage to locate you, somehow. Throw the flood-lights along the deck so that we can see where we're landing. We're fifteen thousand feet up, so we'll prob'ly see the glow from the floods somewhere along the horizon, an' make for it—lucky it's a good clear night. The moment we're down on your deck, switch off every light that shows outside. There's enough wind to drift that other plane a bit wide of you without the beacon to guide him. Are the combat-planes up? Good!"

IN about five minutes, they spotted a little spark of light on the horizon and headed for it, as the spark appeared to be in exactly the right direction. Hurriedly scribbling on a bit of paper: "Enemy following—beacon ordered off—head for spark of light on horizon—as you are," Lammerford passed it around Nan's shoulder in the pilot-enclosure. She nodded—having suspected some such reason for the beacon's silence. Another twenty-five minutes, and they came down softly in a perfect landing on the light-flooded deck of the big float. The moment they were all out of the cabin, a sudden pall of darkness fell upon them, for every visible light was switched off. The conning-tower, the tall aerial mast and the big squat funnel and its gratings were the only projections above the deck-level. Both conning-tower and funnel were built out from the side of the float on a sponson, and the steering was done by electric control when the motors were running.

Climbing to this navigating-cabin, they made themselves comfortable while the radio-operator, who was listening on 39.7 meters, presently told them that the enemy had been talking with his superior officers again, reporting the stoppage of beacon-signals and saying that he was proceeding on the same course in the hope of locating the mysterious float. Then Sparks tuned to fifty-six meters and spoke to the pilot of one combat-plane, who had a telephone-exchange transmitter strapped on his chest and headphones inside his leather helmet, with the short-wave dial on the instrument-board in front of him. His mechanic started or stopped the motor-generator at a hand-signal. Sparks told him of the enemy approaching from about 55 degrees (N.E. by E.) and suggested his flying back a few miles in that direction.

AS it began to look increasingly likely that there would be an aerial fight close aboard if they were not actually bombed, Captain Manning became nervous.

"Beg pardon, Your Lordship, but it looks as though we may be catching it hot, here, within the half-hour! Wouldn't it be advisable for your party to be takin' off in your own plane an' at least gettin' well above the mess, in the air?"

The earls and Archer chuckled.

"Er—thank you, Manning. Very thoughtful of you. But none of us ever yet have asked our people an' friends to stop on in a spot where we didn't fancy it safe to stop, ourselves. Thanks, old chap, but we stop an' see the show with you! No argum'nt!"

At first it seemed as if what show there was might be a mile or two away—it was at least that when the combat-plane began peppering the enemy bomber from a point over her. And in the darkness, with nothing but a vague blur underneath to shoot at, they did very well. But the bomber happened to be a faster boat, and in shooting ahead, passed directly over the float—low enough to see the outline on the water. Banking and whirling about, the bomber came directly back and released two of her aerial torpedoes. It was impossible, however, to calculate speed and angle of drop in the darkness, and the torpedoes hit the water a good six hundred feet beyond the float, not exploding until they were fifty feet down. A great mound of water was thrown upward, and those on the float were almost jarred off their feet by the shock, but—no other harm was done. Before the bomber could bank and come back, the second combat-plane was pouring machine-gun bullets into her cockpits, killing the men in her and sending the plane down out of sight in the sea.

The whole affair was over inside of an hour from the time they had landed. Then, their amphibian having had her fuel-tanks refilled, they took off for the second float—*GBTX*—which had reported by phone that she was on her position ready for business. Her beacon was tuned to 30.8 and 40.7 meters, and so the loop-sets on the amphibian were tuned to synchronize with those frequencies. Without even making any conscious effort to lay a course, Countess Nan—automatically shifting her joy-stick as indicated by the A's and B's in her head-phones—flew straight to the deck of *GBTX*, and came down in a beautiful landing at eight-thirty in the morning.

Chalfont, the master, reported no sign of interest in them from any steamer or plane—in fact, being farther off from any of the steamer-tracks than the *GLOX*, he had seen but one trail of smoke on the horizon since he parted company with her. As he was sending up no smoke at all, and had a deck but eighteen feet above water, with conning-tower and funnel making but a single narrow projection of sixty feet over that, he couldn't have been made out with a glass on a clear day at ten miles' distance. And this was a feature which the two earls had calculated upon in designing the floats—first, to give them the lowest possible visibility, and then to select positions on the chart where even cargo-boats were not likely to come within two hundred miles of them at least. Leaving the *GBTX* shortly after ten, they came down on the Pico flying-field owned by the syndicate which the Trevors controlled at half-past two in the afternoon, just seventeen hours from South Devon—which would have been under fifteen except for the delay caused by the bomber. Next day they started back, stopping but an hour on the *GBTX*.

Half an hour that side of the *GLOX*, however, they sighted a black yacht which seemed to answer Manning's description.

He had said nothing about seeing a gun on her, but as they looked down upon the yacht's bow, four sailors were removing a wooden housing from an eight-inch naval rifle. On the after-deck were other sailors casting off housing from another gun. A broadside of two eight-inch projectiles filled with high-explosive which lets go upon impact can be amazingly destructive, though with twenty-four transverse steel bulkheads in her fifteen-hundred-foot length, it would have taken a dozen or more of such charges to sink the float.

Unquestionably the yacht's commander proposed to use those guns upon something—and the *GLOX* was the only "something" within a two hundred-mile radius. Trevor called

the float, told Manning to get his two bombing-planes into the air at once, fly at top speed for the yacht and sink her as soon as she fired the first shot. Then the Countess took the amphibian out of sight, but not before Harry Archer got a dozen five-by-seven negatives from a camera equipped with telephoto lens—negatives which showed every detail of the two guns, with the projectiles on carriers alongside of them and the men loading.

The bombers flew sufficiently wide to prevent being spotted by the yacht, and when they came up astern, were supposed to be planes sent out to assist in her work, so that no attention was paid to them when they were directly overhead. Countess Nan was now coming up behind, over the bombers. When Lammerford saw through his glasses that both guns had been elevated for a four-mile range, he tapped Nan on the shoulder. She swooped down abreast of the yacht, not more than two hundred feet above the water, and when the yacht's bow swung to port so that both guns could fire, Archer's hands and Earl Trevor's were jabbing the cable-releases of their cameras on one one-hundredth-second exposure just as the fire and black smoke belched from the muzzles of the guns. They got two more shots when the projectiles hit the water eight hundred feet short of the float.

It takes some time to swab and reload an eight-inch naval gun. The gunners never had a chance to fire another shot. One aerial torpedo plunked through the yacht's funnel-grating, wrecking engines and boilers, ripping a hole in her bottom. Another hit the stern not far from the gun. Thirty or more of the officers and crew managed to get boats into the water before she went down, and started pulling toward the float four miles away—but this the bombing-planes wouldn't allow. They sprinkled the water ahead of the boats with bullets and waved them away to eastward. One of the boats was a petrol launch—presumably with sufficient in her tanks to make the coast of France near Brest, towing the others. All ships' boats are supposed to have water and hard-tack aboard. If these didn't, they were out of luck—but they were not going to be taken aboard that float. That was certain!

BEGINNING shortly—if the big floats are not sunk by Continental competitors—you may leave Croydon at six in the morning and eat an eight-o'clock dinner that same evening at the new hotel in Fayal of the Azores—thirteen hundred miles away, in a tropical climate. And three other floats have been laid down in the shipyards at the mouth of the Clyde.

A report to the nation on the mad and marvelous events among the minor leagues in the past wartime summer.

Keep 'Em

TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES, DEAR SIR:

This is a sort of one-man report, Mr. President, to let you know how things have been going in my region. As you and I and everybody else knows, we've had a war on our hands since last December. Along in January, although you were busy with a stack of things, you took time out to answer a question a lot of people were asking. You wrote the Judge—maybe I don't remember the exact words: "One of the best ways to help this country keep its chin up is to keep on playing baseball. Go to it!"

Well, sir, when I hear this, I let out a whoop. Baseball has been my trade all my life. I'm Vic Kennedy, manager of the Freedonia Tigers in the Upland League, Class D. You've heard of the Upland League. Of course you have! We've sent a flock of players to the majors. I'll admit they had to detour through a lot of other leagues first, but they got there.

As soon as the news comes of what you've written the Judge, we begin long-distancing each other. You know the names of the towns in our league—Freedonia, which is us; and Mount Pigsaw, up in the hickory hills; and Reedleyville and Bosco Springs and Americana and Big Center, which has the new defense plant and a ball park illuminated for night games, and struts around.

The next night the heads of the league and us six managers get together in Big Center, and somebody has unexpectedly provided a keg of beer. We clink mugs and smile and say: "We're playing baseball again this year!"

Right there Milt Epps, the killjoy who manages the Big Center Hot-shots, says:

"Playing baseball with what?"

It looks like the whole league is running up and down, and the ball is going forward and back till it's red-hot.

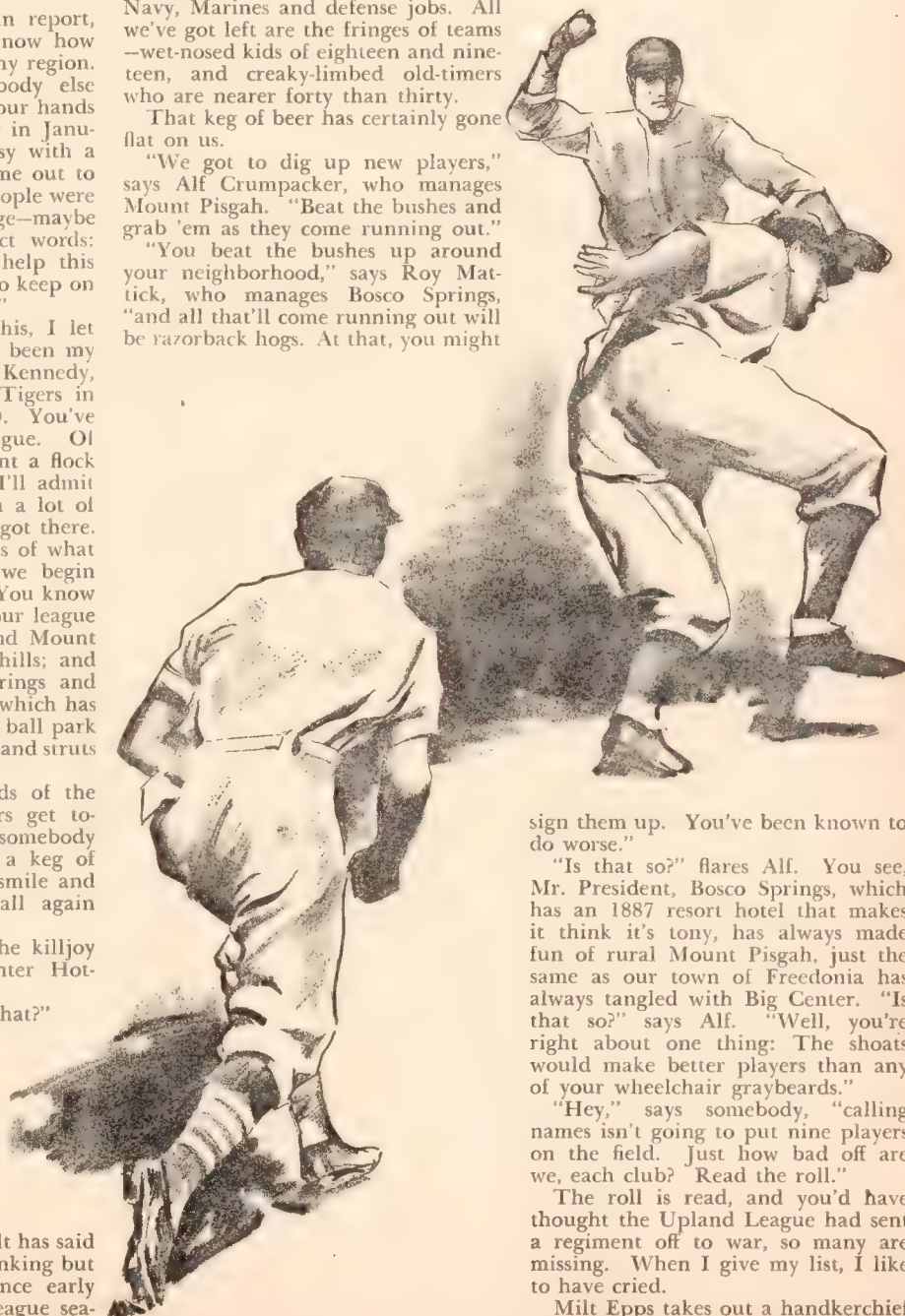
All smiling stops. For Milt has said what all of us have been thinking but haven't dared mention. Since early last September, when our league season ended, half the players who were

regulars are gone—young guys in their twenties, joining up in the Army, Navy, Marines and defense jobs. All we've got left are the fringes of teams—wet-nosed kids of eighteen and nineteen, and creaky-limbed old-timers who are nearer forty than thirty.

That keg of beer has certainly gone flat on us.

"We got to dig up new players," says Alf Crumpacker, who manages Mount Pigsaw. "Beat the bushes and grab 'em as they come running out."

"You beat the bushes up around your neighborhood," says Roy Mat-tick, who manages Bosco Springs, "and all that'll come running out will be razorback hogs. At that, you might



sign them up. You've been known to do worse."

"Is that so?" flares Alf. You see, Mr. President, Bosco Springs, which has an 1887 resort hotel that makes it think it's tony, has always made fun of rural Mount Pigsaw, just the same as our town of Freedonia has always tangled with Big Center. "Is that so?" says Alf. "Well, you're right about one thing: The shoats would make better players than any of your wheelchair graybeards."

"Hey," says somebody, "calling names isn't going to put nine players on the field. Just how bad off are we, each club? Read the roll."

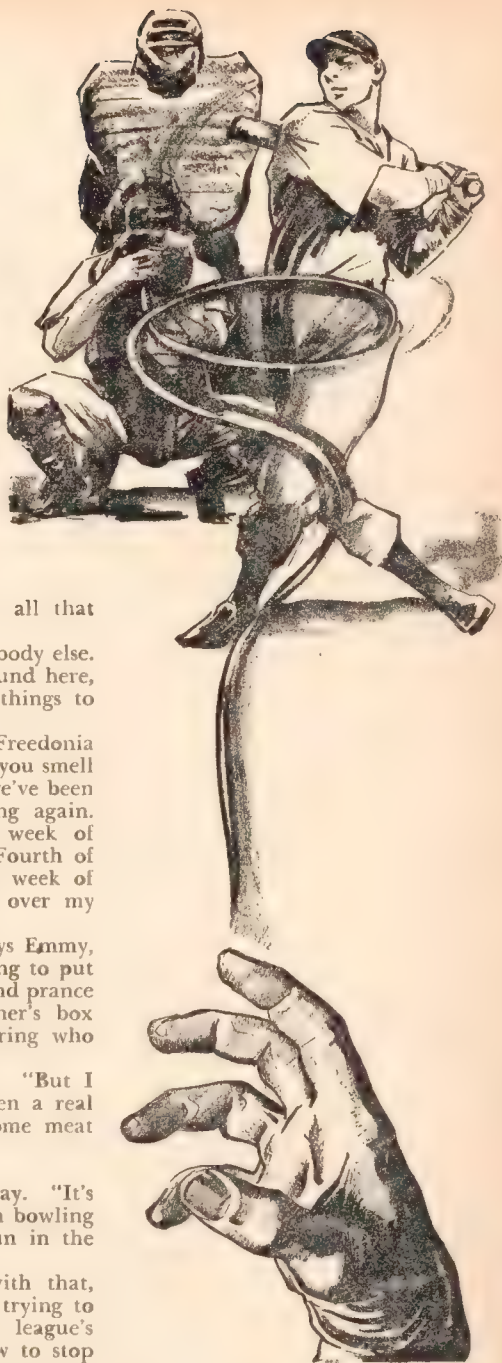
The roll is read, and you'd have thought the Upland League had sent a regiment off to war, so many are missing. When I give my list, I like to have cried.

Milt Epps takes out a handkerchief and looks at me and pretends to dab

Playing

by TALBERT
JOSSELYN

Illustrated by Frederic Anderson



his eyes. Milt and I have never been chummy, from the day thirty years ago when I blocked him off at the plate. I was catching old Matty that afternoon, what with Big Chief Meyers and Larry McLean being laid up. Yes sir, I was the Giants' third-string rookie catcher—my one year in the majors. By that, you can figure how old I am.

Milt Epps was the rookie third-baseman of the Pirates, and in the ninth inning, with them one run behind, he came charging into the plate all buck teeth and spikes. He was minus one buck tooth when he finished, and I had a spike-rip in my thigh you can still see the scar of. But he didn't score that run.

AND now, here it is thirty years later, and he's been managing Big Center the last six-seven years, along with running his garage, and I've been managing Freedonia and taking care of my bowling alley on the side. Milt and I get along good enough, but he's always watching me out of those bright blue eyes, ready to give me the needle, and I've always been ready to give it right back.

Milt shakes his head at me, there at the meeting in the Elks Club. Then he gives a hee-haw like a mule. "Ah, cheer up, Kennedy," he says. "Things won't get really bad until you run out of so many players you'll have to put on the tools of ignorance yourself and go behind the plate."

I burn at that one. Calling a catcher's equipment the tools of ignorance! Whereas you and I and everybody else knows that if it wasn't for the catcher, no team would ever amount to anything.

"Listen, hee-haw," I say. "When I put on those so-called tools of ignorance again, it'll be to block a jug-head like you trying to come in to the plate."

"Oh, yeah?" he says.

"Oh, yeah!" I say.

Little did I realize what all that saying would lead to.

"Ah, come on," says somebody else. "It's getting mighty dry around here, and we've got a thousand things to attend to."

When I get back home to Freedonia my wife Emmy says, "Phew, you smell of beer!" and I say: "Sure, we've been getting the old league going again. Start it as usual the last week of April, split the season the Fourth of July, and finish the second week of September. If you'll look over my uniform—"

"Do you mean to say," says Emmy, "that a man your age is going to put on that monkey suit again and prance up and down in the coacher's box and have everybody wondering who the animated mattress is?"

"I'm no mattress," I say. "But I never saw a man who'd been a real catcher who didn't have some meat on his bones."

"Meat?" says Emmy.

"All right, all right!" I say. "It's nothing I can't take off with bowling and some hiking with a gun in the hills."

And it wasn't. What with that, and running myself ragged trying to find eighteen players—our league's player limit—who know how to stop a ball, even if they don't know what base to throw it to. But somehow I contrive to find 'em, and so do the other managers; and when the league season opens, we all have complete clubs.

There never was an opening day here in Freedonia like this one for enthusiasm and excitement, and everybody else says the same. It was a sort of combination of the fact we were at war and still had baseball, and a thousand other American things. Big Center is our opponent. As soon as

we've had the opening ceremonies, Milt Epps is showing his teeth and saying: "All right, old hayrick! Boy, are we going to take you to the cleaners!"

And I'm saying: "It'll take more than all the donkeys on your team to do it!"

Then the two teams are going to it.

BIG CENTER has come to the game in a caravan, with their night-shift defense workers all present and howl-

ing their heads off. Freedonia is howling back. The old Freedonia wagon-factory has been converted into making some kind of parts for bombers, and its workers are in our bleachers, and they keep right on bombing. They throw firecrackers all during the game, and Big Center returns 'em. Everybody lets off excess steam, as you might say. Maybe that was what you had in mind, Mr. President, when you said we needed baseball.

I WON'T go into too many details about that game. It's the sort where half the time I jump up and down screeching for joy, and half the time I cover my eyes to shut out the horror of it.

Nineteen-year-old Harvey Fosdick is on the mound for us; he strikes out twelve batters; he wild-pitches five times, and each time our forty-year-old catcher, Emil Gettsinger, lets runs come in all the way from second. Our left-fielder is eighteen-year-old Oris Klumpp, who's never played before such a crowd in his life. When the first fly is hit at him, all Big Center yells: "Mine, mine! Look out behind you! Center-fielder takes it! I got it!" Oris never gets within twenty feet of the ball. When the next fly comes to left-field, he runs smack into our center-fielder, who's trying to make the catch.

At that, the Big Center Hotshots aren't any balls of fire. They have a Fancy Dan young pitcher who has a complicated delivery, and after we've yelled "Balk, balk, balk!" at him for an hour, he finally does balk, and then stands so frozen with the ball that three runners come all the way around to score. He's dragged from the game, fighting the nearest people he can reach.

In the first of the ninth we lead by two runs. It's a cinch! Then,

with two out, Big Center fills the bags. And then our bright young Harvey Fosdick, with the count three and two on the batter, sees the runner on third taking a big lead, nearly half-way home. It's too much for Harvey. He tries to run that runner down.

I've never seen such a terrible sight. In no time, catcher Emil Gettsinger has horned in, and so has the third-baseman and the left-fielder and the shortstop and the second-baseman. Meantime, the Big Center runners on second and first have come roaring into third. It looks like the whole league is running up and down, and the ball is going forward and back till it's red-hot.

All this time Milt Epps is standing in the coacher's box at third, right in the middle of this whirlpool, joyously whacking his hands together and yelling: "Hi-hi, hi-hi!" Suddenly he puts up his hands and motions for the ball to be thrown to him. Harvey Fosdick has somehow got hold of the ball again, and he tosses it straight at Milt.

Milt gives a cackle and steps aside, and the ball goes all the way into the left-field bleachers, where the Big Center fans hide it. Before we can find that ball, all three runners score.

We lose the game.

There are fights all over that ballpark. There are fights all over town. Big Center starts for home, its joy somewhat dampened when they find that somebody has let the air out of the tires of the bus that's brought the Big Center team. All of Freedonia stands around and yells, "Get a horse, get a horse!" and fights break out all over again—which helps some, but not much. We've lost the opening game.

Meantime, there've been other happenings that day. You remember what I told you about the rivalry be-

tween Bosco Springs and Mount Pisgah. Well, their teams meet up at Pisgah. The Pisgah team has always worn red uniforms, which Bosco Springs says is only natural, since the inhabitants of Pisgah wear red flannel underwear the year round.

A bunch of comedians from Bosco Springs take up an old hand-drawn fire-engine on a truck and unload it on the field and go around asking the Pisgah ball-players where the fire is. Later another Bosco Springs comedian shows up, all diked out in red like the Devil, and carrying a pitchfork, and claims the Pisgah players are his imps who've run away, and won't they please come home.

Mount Pisgah goes wild with rage, and when they lose the game, they try to tip over the little fire-engine when Bosco Springs is putting it on their truck, and they throw so many rocks at the bus carrying the Bosco Springs players, that the players have to lie down on the bus floor. Such a thing hadn't happened since the days when the Chicago fans used to rock the hotel bus that's carrying the hated New York Giants to the Cubs' ballpark, and John McGraw and Matty and Mike Donlin and the other Giants have to flatten themselves on the floor to keep from getting conked.

WELL, Mr. President, I'll skip the weeks that follow and get to the main part of my story. I will say that in all my baseball career I never have experiences like I have during those weeks.

I mean, what with everybody going off to the war, it gets harder and harder finding enough players so I can have nine men on the field. They tell the story that I stop people on the street—anybody—and say: "Ball park. Two o'clock. You're pitching." My wife Emmy says I even tell her this, but of course she's just kidding.

My players get younger and older, if you get what I mean. I'm taking kids just out of knee-pants, and all I'm asking of a veteran is that his hair isn't snow-white.

The same things happen to the other teams. Of course, this leads to things on the diamond that would make old Abner Doubleday turn over in his grave. At the same time it makes for the closest and most exciting pennant-race in years. First one club is ahead and then another. It finally looks, as we go toward the last half of the season, that the club that digs up one really classy player will win it.

Milt Epps and I each dig up such a player at almost the same time.

I dig up Rip Redfield. He's a left-hander and a spitball pitcher. A spitball pitcher? Yes sir. With spitball pitching ruled out in 1920, you're thinking Rip is somebody with whis-

I only hope I live long enough to find out who left that bat lying there.



kers down to here, and I don't blame you. But you'll recollect that when all trick deliveries were banned, it was stipulated that pitchers then using the spitball were to be allowed to continue pitching it. Rip then was in his early twenties. You remember seeing him pitch, Mr. President. Who doesn't remember Rip Redfield? He lasts nearly twenty years, and then I don't hear of him any more. And then, here he is in Freedonia, poking me in the ribs and grinning from ear to ear. He's lean and tanned and fit—he always did keep in top condition—and he's around forty-five, give or take a couple years.

We talk. It seems he's got hold of some money somehow—don't ask me how he's done it—and he's bought a farm west of Freedonia. "But farming aint going to take all my time," he says. He grins wider. "How's for signing me up?"

"Sign you up?" I say.

"Sure," he says. "With so many old-timers back in the game, I can't stay out any longer." He chuckles. "I'm the old fire-horse seeing the engines go by."

I try him out; and boy, is it my turn to grin! Of course he hasn't got the old speed, but he's still got control, and his head—and he's got that spitter. Does it take me back! It's like watching Jack Chesbro or Ed Walsh or Bugs Raymond again. That ball comes spinning until it's almost to the plate, and then suddenly it commences to float and wobble, and then darts down and out. A guy thinks he's seeing things. Unless he's set for it, a batter will break his back trying to hit it.

I almost hug Old Rip. "Boy, oh, boy," I say, "this is going to be good!" I'm thinking of Milt Epps. I been thinking of him ever since he tricked nineteen-year-old Harvey Fosdick to throw that ball to him, opening day.

SO I keep Rip under cover until Milt and his Big Center Hotshots come to Freedonia for a series. Then I send Rip in.

I wish you could have seen Milt Epps as Rip goes toward the mound. Milt is in the third-base coach's box. He puts his head more and more on one side—and he looks just like a bluejay. You know how a bluejay cocks its head and peers and views with alarm—then starts squawking. Old Rip Redfield pitches. The ball comes sailing in; the batter takes a terrific cut at it—and misses it by two feet.

Milt Epps goes straight up in the air, just like a jay that's been hit with a load of shot. He lands running, and is he squawking! He storms up to the plate umpire.

"Stop it, stop it, stop it!" he screeches. "He's throwing a spitball. Illegal! Stop it!"



Harvey Fosdick is on the mound; he strikes out twelve batters; he wild-pitches five times.

a full game in the lead when we go over to Big Center for the final series, which is for four games, all to be played under the night-lights of their park.

And then Milt Epps pulls his whizzer on us.

When Rip Redfield takes the mound for us in the opening game, a short, bowlegged guy with a face like a nutcracker steps into the first-base coach's box for Big Center. He's sixty years old if he's a day. He opens his mouth and begins bellowing uncivil greetings at the whole Freedonia team, including myself. Instantly I know who he is. There's nobody in baseball but old Red Conroy who's got a voice like that, or words like those. And smart! A fox is a goose compared to him. Rip stares at him, and Rip all of a sudden doesn't seem happy. He takes up his pitching position, and his hands come up in front of his face.

YOU remember how all spitball pitchers masked the ball with their glove as they went through the motions of dampening a spot on it. They went through the motions every time in the same way. But they didn't always really dampen the ball, and that's what made them so effective. The batter never knew whether they were getting ready to throw the spitter, or were just pretending, and were going to throw a regular curve or fast ball. No batter could take a toe-hold when facing a spitball pitcher.

Well, sir, Rip slowly goes through his motions with the glove masking the ball. He pitches. The instant he pitches, that batter shortens his grip and meets that down-breaking ball with a quick, short chop. The hit goes past Rip into center-field.

Even as it's going, Rip whirls and looks at old Red Conroy in the coacher's box. Old Red is howling: "Wahoo, wahoo! Happy days are here again!" And you can hear him in the next county.

Rip finally turns and faces the next batter. He goes through his preliminary motions. He pitches—and the batter clouts his fast ball for a double. And in the coacher's box old Red Conroy begins to chant:

"Oh, the elephant he goes around and the band begins to play, and the boys in front of the monkey's cage had better keep away!"

Rip throws down his glove and tramples on it. He starts for old Red

I come sauntering up from our bench. "What makes more noise than a pig under a gate?" I ask.

But Milt is in no mood to answer riddles.

"Spitball! Illegal!" he squalls at the umps.

"What's illegal about it?" I ask.

Milt gives me the works. "You old bonehead!" he howls. "Everything's illegal about it! Tampering with the ball!" He whirls on the umps. "You know the rule! No player shall—" He gives the whole of Section Four, Rule Fourteen, in a high, shrill voice. The words come tumbling: "Rosin—paraffin—sand-paper—emery-paper—or other substance—"

"Or psychological," I say.

"You go to hell!" shouts Milt. He grabs the umps. "Throw this pitcher out of the game!"

"He's staying in the game," I say. "All legal. In 1920 all spitball pitchers were registered, and were allowed to continue pitching that way. Here," I say, and I take out a paper, "if you're so dumb you can't read, and I've always suspected it,—the umps can read it for you. It's the registration of Rip Redfield as a spitball pitcher. Or is some old cluck like you going to tell how baseball should be run?"

That was that, although Milt squalls a quarter-hour longer.

I never see a pitcher have more fun that afternoon than Rip Redfield, and I never see a coacher have a worse time than Milt Epps.

We now look like a cinch to win the first half of the split season. We're

and thinks better of it. He picks up his glove and faces the next batter. The batter singles, and Rip is fit to be tied.

I go out to the mound. Rip's eyes are pinpoints, and his face is a dirty white, he's so mad. He says between set teeth:

"That old baboon! He's reading my pitches and signaling the batters. Years ago he was the only one who ever could do it, and now Milt Epps has found him, and he's at it again! And I've never learned what I do that tips him off!"

I TRY to calm Rip down. We go over the things he may be doing: Is he giving the pitch away by rotating his fingers on the ball when he really moistens it, and just dabbing his fingers at the ball when he doesn't? No, he never does that. Is he looking at the ball when he dampens it and not looking when he doesn't? No, that isn't it. We go through the whole list, and all this while old Red Conroy is cackling and howling at us: "They want to know how it's done! It's all done with mirrors, my friends. Mirrors that can look right through solid skulls. For twenty-five cents we will demonstrate. The mirror that looks through solid ivory!"

Meantime Milt Epps is yelling from the third-base box: "Take him out, hayrick! Take him out. You would dig up the dead!"

I don't know whether to go hit Milt Epps or Red Conroy. The ball park is bedlam, and the umps is shouting: "Play ball!"

"Keep on pitching," I say to Rip. "We'll figure it out."

But we don't figure it out, and in the third inning I have to yank Rip. We lose the game.

We win the next game; we lose the next—and we come down to the final game all even.

Well, sir, there's never been such a crowd in the Big Center ball park as that evening. People have come from everywhere, even from the big cities. They've heard how this game settles the first half of our pennant race; they've heard about the antics of old Red Conroy in the coacher's box, and about our having Rip Redfield, the only spitball pitcher left in America.

Only I'm not so sure about our having any spitball pitcher left. With old Red Conroy having the Indian sign on Rip, I don't dare use him unless I absolutely have to. I'm down to fifteen players on the club, what with injuries, and I've worked all my pitchers in these last three games. The Big Center team isn't much better off.

The game begins.

First we're ahead and then they're ahead. By the fifth inning it's a parade of pitchers and pinch-hitters and pinch-runners, with the excitement

boiling up like a kettle of grease. In the eighth we get a man on third. I got to do it. I yank our pitcher who's going up to bat, and put in our last pinch-hitter. He squeezes the runner home.

Now I've got no pitcher left except Rip Redfield.

"Gimme that ball!" says Rip, and starts for the mound.

Out in the first-base coacher's box, old Red Conroy, who's been driving the crowd nuts by turning cartwheels and imitating barnyard animals, gives one bellow and yells:

"Welcome, brother!"

I put my hand over my eyes. "Here it comes!" I say.

Rip pitches. Old Red flashes the tip-off to the batter. The batter connects, but he only gets a piece of it. It's a towering foul near the backstop, and our catcher goes for it.

Well, sir, Mr. President, I only hope I live long enough to find out who it was that left that bat lying there. Our catcher steps full on it—and by the time we pick him up, he's got an ankle he won't be using for weeks. I look around for another catcher, and I don't see any other catcher. I don't see anybody on our club who hasn't been in the game. I'm all out of players. Except myself.

It takes me time to realize what this means, and the crowd howls, "Play ball, play ball!" and the umps pulls out his watch.

I tell the umps what's happened. Milt Epps comes up, and I tell him. Milt gives a terrific hee-haw.

"I got to have another catcher," I say.

"If you get somebody not on your team, you'll forfeit the game!" says Milt. He hee-haws again. "You got to put on the tools of ignorance yourself. You got to go behind the plate!"

There's nothing else to do. I haven't caught in years and years. I put on mask and shin-guards. I struggle into a protector never built for what I weigh, and I go out to talk sig-

nals with Rip Redfield. Old Red Conroy in the coacher's box gets down on his knees and begs a monster like me not to eat him, and the crowd goes crazy with delight. I come back to the plate and crouch down, and I hear myself creak all over, and I say: "One run ahead and two innings to go. We got to hold 'em."

We don't hold 'em. Between Rip's pitching and my catching and old Red's coaching, it's a nightmare. They shove three runs across the plate, and they shriek their joy. Then all shrieking stops, sudden. Milt Epps discovers that in switching players and master-minding those runs across the plate, he's master-minded himself into an impossible jam. He's got no third-base man. He stands there shuffling and reshuffling his team, and it comes out the same each time. For third base he's got the choice between a lame-armed pitcher who can't toss a beanbag ten feet, and himself. Milt dazedly goes to play third.

WELL, Mr. President, you may have read about the innings that follow.

I look at Milt standing there at third, and I say: "Oh, boy!" And: "Bunt to third!" I tell our batters.

We bunt. Maybe you've seen a third-rate juggler—eh, Mr. President? Well, Milt is worse than a fourth-rate juggler. He's so bad that I bunt and get safe to first. Somebody advances me to third. Two runs are in and two are out, and the score is tied. I step off third, whacking my hands and yelling. The next thing I know, Milt crams the ball into my ribs. Don't ask me how he's worked the moth-eaten hidden-ball trick on me. But he's worked it.

The ball park is still howling like hyenas as I put on my catching equipment. I try to shut out the hideous sound by concentrating on Rip Redfield as he makes his preliminary tosses. And suddenly I see what Rip's tip-off is, that keen-eyed old Red Conroy has been detecting. It's as simple as this: When Rip is getting ready for throwing his spitter, the peak of his cap rises. His facial muscles do it. The peak rises only a fraction of an inch, but enough for the give-away.

I go out to the mound and tell Rip. A look comes on his face. "Good night!" he says. "It's been happening all these years, and I never knew it! But oh, boy, watch me from now on!"

I go back behind the plate. And who is the next batter coming up, but Milt Epps! And, "Oh, boy!" I say.

Milt is still ribbing me about the hidden ball. He looks at old Red Conroy as Rip gets ready to pitch. Rip pitches. Red flashes the sign. Milt shifts for a spitter, swinging wide for where the ball is going to be. If



Red Conroy

isn't there. It's a fast ball, and it hits Milt smack in the breadbasket.

They have to walk Milt up and down before he can go to first. And then he isn't so wild at Rip having hit him, as he is at old Red having double-crossed him by flashing the wrong signal. They stand raging at each other, and I cup my hands and lift my voice, and do I chip in my two-bits' worth!

I'll say this for Milt, though. On Rip's first pitch to the next batter, Milt is off for second. I throw, and it feels as though I've thrown my whole arm along with the ball. Milt is safe, and he jumps up and down and howls at me.

"I'll get him," I tell myself, "if my arm comes right off at the shoulder doing it." I walk out to the mound and call in the shortstop and second-baseman. "I'm going to pull the delayed throw," I say. I explain what they're to do. It's a play Johnny Kling and Joe Tinker and Johnny Evers of the old Cubs made famous a thousand years ago.

Rip pitches. I take it and pretend I'm going to throw to second. Our shortstop races over, while our second-baseman stands still. Milt darts back toward the bag, then slows down. The shortstop, walking back to his position, says to Milt: "If old hayrick had thrown, we'd have had you flatfooted." For one fatal instant Milt turns his head to pop off at him. I throw. From a thousand throats comes a yell to Milt: "Look out!" Milt looks, but it's too late. The second-baseman gets the ball right at the bag and jabs it into Milt's ribs.

It takes half Milt's team to drag him to their bench.

Well, Mr. President, I'm almost through. That game goes on and on and on. My arm is like one big toothache. The fingers of my meat hand are like bananas. Each time I crouch down to give Rip the sign, I wonder if I can get up again.

Only one thing keeps me going, and that's the sight of Milt Epps pottering around on legs like rubber. I tell myself: "I'm going to outlast him. I've got to." I tell myself: "It's only for this one game. Just as soon as it's over, I can lie down and rest for a year."

SUDDENLY it's the fifteenth inning. Somehow Milt Epps is on third. I remember. It's when I let his third strike get past me, and they sacrifice him around. There are two out. The batter slashes a grounder to the shortstop. He fumbles it, and Milt is half-way home. The shortstop throws.

The ball is coming. Milt is coming. I get the ball, and Milt is—

And that instant everything goes black. I don't mean I pass out. I mean, the lights of the Big Center



"You old bonehead!" Milt howls. "You know the rule!"

ball park go out, and we are in pitch blackness.

Nobody ever discovers how those lights go out. It may be by accident, and it may be on purpose. But we never learn. Perhaps they're out ten seconds, and then they come on. And then there's more hell in that ball park than there's ever been since baseball was invented.

That play at the plate has been made in pitch blackness. The ump's can't say whether Milt is safe or out.

A thousand fights start at the snap of your fingers. They keep on. Nobody can clear the field. They quit trying to. The game has to be called.

Well, Mr. President, there you are. There's only one man who can handle a thing like this, and that's the Judge himself. We put it straight up to him. Somebody says he tugs his hair and tries to shove it off onto you, Mr. President, on the ground that you're the man responsible for baseball this year.

Anyway, the Judge finally hands us down his decision, and it goes something like this:

"That in all equitable fairness to both clubs, the game shall be replayed with the teams made up of the players who were last in the line-up—and those players shall play, and the game shall continue until one team has scored more runs than the other team at the end of even innings."

This, boiled down into plain language, means that both Milt Epps and I are playing. Which is why I'm now rubbing liniment on myself and getting ready to put on my catching equipment. And I don't know when I'll get it off. It may be for the duration.

"Keep 'em playing!" you said, Mr. President.

You sure hit the nail on the head. I now close my report of what's been happening in our region.

Your sincere friend,
VIC KENNEDY

The author of "The Man Who Forgot Three Years" here gives us a fine novel of wagon-freighting days.

Hauling West

by John T. McIntyre

The Story So Far:

YOU are a stranger here, I think," said the landlord of the Horse and Bridle tavern at Perth Amboy. "And I'd say from some distance."

"From back in Pennsylvania. Wagoning into the West, over the mountains," answered the young man. "You would know the firm of Moreau, Descoings and Abernathy, I suppose?"

"Oh, very well," replied the innkeeper. "They are the oldest Amboy people in the trade—a prosperous house!" "Maybe you'd be acquainted with Simon Abernathy?"

"Indeed I am. In his time he was an able man—no one knew the ways of the road as he. But he's quite old now—only the shadow of what he has been."

The young man thought again of the letter in his pocket: "Denis!" That's how the paper began. "Owen is dead, I know. But you, who are now a man grown, are still strong and alive; and I'm calling to you. What has come to me in my old age, God alone knows. . . . But I ask you to forget them, and come immediately to my help."

And then his grandfather's name.

Denis Abernathy found his grandfather living at the house of the all-too-affable Mr. Dacre in Philadelphia. And the old man told him how he had been eased out of active participation in the firm's management by the Descoings—father and son; and of the unaccountable shrinkage in the wagon freighting, which had been his share of the business. Old Simon told also of four attempts upon his life which had been made in recent months. . . .

From other sources Denis had confirmation of the strange state of affairs in the old transportation company: from lovely Lois Moreau and her young cousin Gerard Monselet, whom he had met at an inn on the road and who had come up from New Orleans to find out what had become of their usual dividends from the firm; from old Simon's lawyer Counselor Thistlewate, who did not doubt that the attacks had been genuine; from an apparently chance acquaintance the horse-surgeon Kipper, who went out of his way to warn Denis of an unprovoked attack by a rowdy known as Mule Shapely, in time for Denis to beat the attacker to the punch.

And then—the whole weird business came into tragic focus when Denis, calling to see Simon one evening, found the old man lying strangled on the bed in his ransacked bedroom. (*The story continues in detail:*)



A WEEK passed; and then two. They were weeks filled with hurry and anxiety. Pronounced by the law to have been murdered, and with officers diligently in search of the criminal, old Simon Abernathy was buried.

The investigation made by the authorities revealed some details that had interest:

On the evening of his death the old man had remained in his office on the waterfront for a full hour longer than was his habit. Mr. Dacre, who left the countinghouse shortly afterward, saw him in the street, making his way home.

When Dacre unlocked and opened the street door, he saw Simon part way up the stairs. The old man paused with his hand on the rail and looked back when he heard the closing door. He told Dacre that he had no appetite for supper; also that he had some things that needed attention and did not wish to be disturbed. If he required anything, he said, he'd call.

There had been no sound from his rooms. Dacre was sure of that; so was his wife. And yet it was quite evident that the havoc wrought in the bedroom was so marked that it could not have been done noiselessly. After puzzling over the thing for some days, there was a new development. Both Mrs. Dacre and her kitchen maid had been out during the latter part of the afternoon. Mrs. Dacre had been visiting friends; and the kitchen girl had taken advantage of her absence to go a-visiting also. The house had been deserted from two to three hours during the afternoon.



The criminal, so the authorities concluded, must have known and taken advantage of this. He'd entered the place, and quite likely was still there when the old man entered the room after speaking to Dacre on the stairs.

"The intruder," reasoned Justice Hasty, "had finished his ransacking of the place. He knew the women had returned, and was awaiting a chance to leave unseen. The old man entering the room brought things to a sudden crisis. The murder, I'd say, was done in the first minute after the door closed behind him."

There were many rough characters in the town; and it was recalled that the old man had the reputation, as old people of lonely habits often have, of being a miser. Hoards of money, it was said, was secreted in his room; his strong-box, was stuffed with gold coin and bank-notes.

"That's what the party was after," said Voxer, the constable. "But when Mr. Abernathy walked in on him, he was caught. And so the old gentleman was strangled."

Denis spoke to the justice about the previous attempts on his grandfather's life. Had they too been for the purpose of robbery?

"There is no information to the contrary," said Hasty. He looked sharply at the young man through his lenses. "Have you any ideas about them?"

"None, except that four attempts upon a person's life shows a good deal of determination. They would seem to me to indicate something more than robbery."

"Robbery was the motive of the last of them," Hasty insisted. "There was evidence of it wherever you turned in the room."

The horse surgeon, Kipper, however, scorned the idea. "Whoever it was," he told Denis, "wasn't looking for money. There was something else in his mind. And hark to me, the murder wasn't done because the man was found in the room and had to kill to escape. It was a carefully planned part of the whole thing."

At the end of the second week a sealed parcel came to Denis by wagon. Counselor Thistlewate was at once notified, and appeared at the President Monroe Tavern. He immediately gave his attention to the contents of the parcel; and for the best part of an hour pored over copies of records, affidavits and such things. Now and then he'd look up and nod; each nod indicated to Denis that matters were growing more and more satisfactory.

FINALLY the Counselor pushed the papers away from him and sat back in his chair; he removed his glasses and gestured with them to mark the points he made. "In what you have here," he said, "there is a tight, weighty body of evidence. It is evidence that will settle the mind of a judge and make the necessary findings quite clear to him. I congratulate you upon your good sense in collecting it and having it ready."

"All that was my mother's doing," said Denis. "My father would never listen to any thought of a time when either he or myself would have reason to show we were anything to Simon Abernathy. But my mother had none of his hatred or contempt. There would come a day—she said this to me, her young son, more than once—when it would be necessary to prove that I was who I claimed to be. And," said Denis, "she was right."

"You are Simon Abernathy's grandson," said the Counselor, tapping the papers upon the table before him. "and are here so proven beyond all peradventure. However," he said, "your troubles with courts of law will be as nothing compared with what you'll face when they are satisfied and finished with you. Your real difficulties will begin when you approach the threshold of Moreau, Descoings & Abernathy, and lay claim to part of the business."

The old attorney went on from that point; and as he talked, he watched the strong, handsome face before him. He saw the Abernathy strength in it; but there was something else: He saw a calm willingness to examine and judge. And as he singled this out, the Counselor knew that it was Ann Craufurd's gift to her son. But the hard Abernathy part of him predominated—the swift gaze, the powerful jaw, the tall, splendid body; the resolution and readiness of his bearing. Above all, there was the temperament whose heat set wrath a-boiling and there was the hand that lifted so suddenly and struck so hard.

"When you come to the door of this inheritance," said the Counselor, and he said it gravely, "you'll not open it gently. You are one of those who have a fixed belief that what is yours is yours."

"In this case, at any rate, that will be so. And anyone who ventures between," said Denis, "may be sorry for it afterward."

"That is what the young Simon would have said. And very likely Owen too," said the Counselor. "But take my advice and go carefully in all your undertakings in this matter. Mere accusations will do you nothing but harm. Your grandfather was a fiery, headlong man. Suspecting the Descoings, he plunged at them much as he was once accustomed to do with his wagoners. But they beat him back with ease. He raged and stormed; but he had no proof; he could do nothing that inconvenienced them. That," said the Counselor, "is what broke him down. I advised him to go slow, to wait; but he was not a man that could be spoken to."

"I agree with what you say," said Denis. "Anything that is done must be done carefully."

"After you have established yourself in the eyes of the law," said the stout Counselor, "the Descoings' first action is likely to be one to oust you. They'll no more want your hand in their affairs than they wanted your grandfather's."

"As his heir, shall I not have the same rights he had?"

"The very same. But they made it hard for him. You are inexperienced; they may make it harder in your case."

"On the other hand," said Denis with a tight smile, "he was an old man. They may find me different."

That same afternoon Denis was sitting in the public room of the President Monroe Tavern when Gerard Monselet walked in. The young Creole shook his hand.

"I hope you are bearing up under all this," he said. "It's been quite shocking."

They had some brandy at the bar, and talked over the happenings of the last few weeks.

"I had hoped to see you," said Monselet, "but somehow couldn't manage it. We are in New York now, at the house of some relatives of Lois'. They found out we were here, and insisted. It was not just correct that she should be here and I should be here; my relationship was not close enough for safety."

Monselet threw off his heavy green cloth coat, and they sat down. "I don't care for the establishment," he told Denis. "It's cold and stiff. I'm afraid Lois does not like it either. But she does not say."

"Are these relatives also Moreaus?"

"Oh, no! No Moreau could ever be as they are. They are, in a kind of remote way, attached to Lois' mother. Their name is Sigourney. Also I find they are connected, in perhaps a more remote way, with the Descoings."

Denis lifted his brows. "That may be interesting."

Gerard Monselet shook his head.

"I've been seeing something of the Descoings," he told Denis. "I disliked Louis very much. But I dislike his father still more. He is very smooth, and, I think, a rascal. A sort of wrinkled old imp. When he enters a room, he brings something with him—what, I don't know; but it makes me uncomfortable."

"Thistlewate has the same idea of him."

"As I've said, Lois is uneasy, but she'll not admit it. I think I told you once," said the young Creole, "that Lois is a charming girl. In spite of her obvious faults of temperament, she is kind and thoughtful when you really know her. So she'd not on any account have the Sigourneys know that she's not happy in their house."

"Another thing," said Monselet: "As she's here on business,—her father's business,—she tries to forget everything else. But it's plain to me she's not been able to do that. There are a number of things that are bothering her. As a matter of fact, I think you are one of them."

Denis said nothing in reply to this; but he sat looking at Monselet steadily.

"The day the news came of your grandfather's death, I could see she was shocked. Murder had never come close to her before. She said to me she wished certain things were not true."

"She still holds to her misbelief in me?"

"I'm afraid so. Lois, as you've seen, is very firm—though I do believe the Sigourneys have a good deal to do with her state of mind just now."

MONSELET said these relatives talked as though they thought the Descoings marvelous people. Indeed, old Henri Descoings seemed a sort of patron saint with them. His commercial sagacity excited their wonder; his moral strength was a theme for praise. The struggle he'd made against Simon Abernathy, the meekness with which he'd borne the charges made against him by that vitriolic old man, his steady purpose and honest understanding were sounded and resounded through long evenings.

"I've been hoping," said Monselet, "that Lois would say something that would show how she's feeling. That would give me an opportunity. But she never has. I'd not care to see her go back to New Orleans having accomplished nothing; that might break her spirit. But all the time she's in that old rookery across the bay," he said, "I've a feeling she's in danger. Because, Abernathy, some of these ancient ménages drip with poison—especially when the people who live in them are as bitter and dry as the Sigourneys are. There are always some filthy little intrigues going on. I don't like seeing Lois exposed to such an atmosphere."

The young man paused for a space; but Denis saw he had not yet finished, and so was silent.

"I came here this afternoon," said Monselet, "hoping to have a chance to talk. And not altogether about Lois; you were to be my principal theme. There has been a good deal of twaddle about you at the Sigourneys'," he said. "And not favorable."

"I'm glad to provide them with interest," said Denis, smiling.

"There are two women," said Monselet, "as sharp in their minds and as evil in their thoughts as a pair of old harpies. Then there's a round-headed old man, quite deaf, and who seems to be stewing in venom at every hour of the day. However," said Monselet, "this is only in passing. What I want to say is: you'd best visit Lois at the Sigourneys'." Seeing the look of surprise in Denis' face, he added: "She's had word from her father. He says he is coming north, up the river from New Orleans. He's lately become interested in some steamers that are offered for sale. Lois will be leaving for the West to join him. And I think she'd be relieved to see you before she goes."

"Has she said so?"

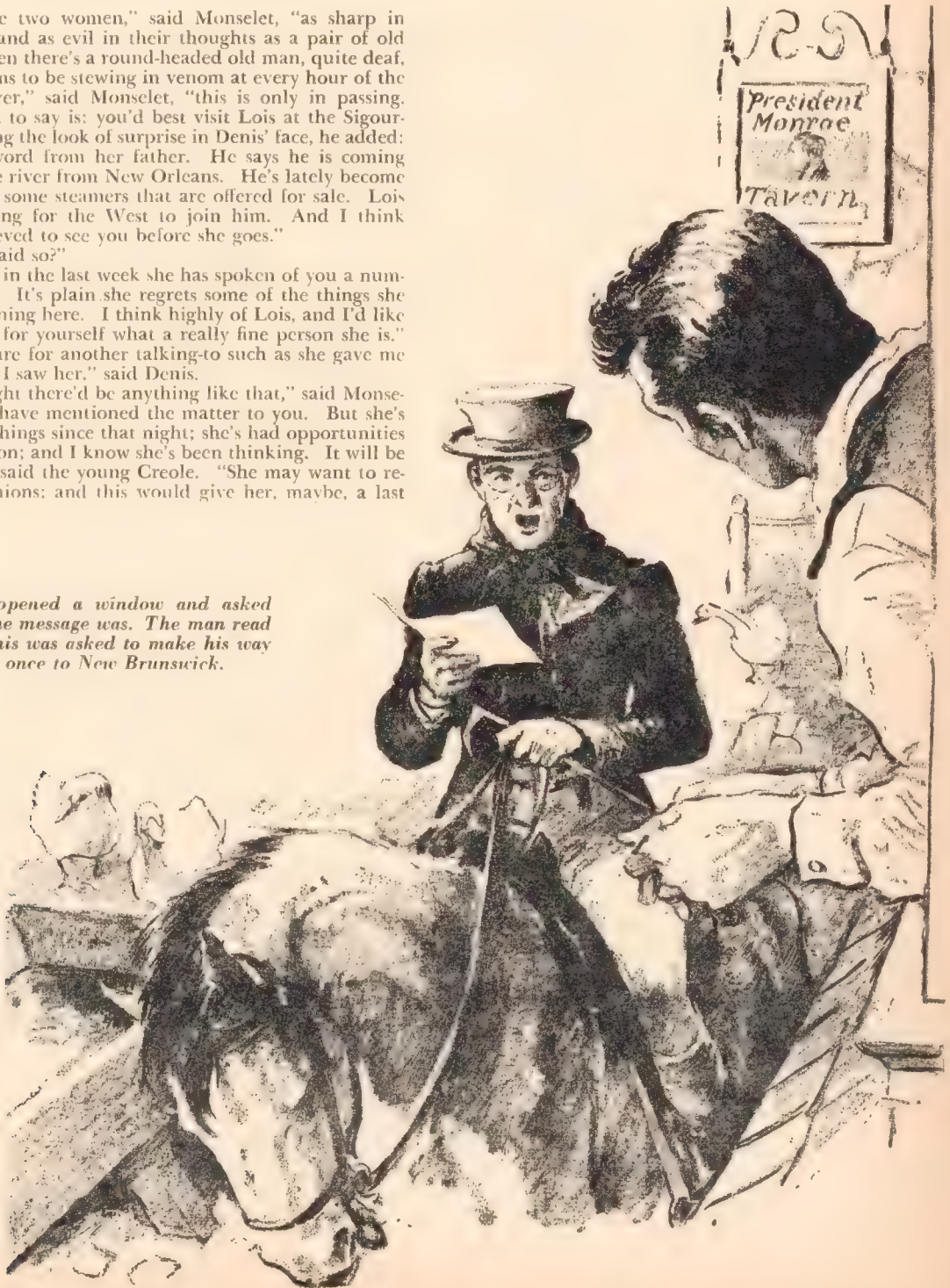
"No. But in the last week she has spoken of you a number of times. It's plain she regrets some of the things she said that evening here. I think highly of Lois, and I'd like you to learn for yourself what a really fine person she is."

"I'd not care for another talking to such as she gave me the last time I saw her," said Denis.

"If I thought there'd be anything like that," said Monselet, "I'd not have mentioned the matter to you. But she's noted some things since that night; she's had opportunities for observation; and I know she's been thinking. It will be a kindness," said the young Creole. "She may want to revise her opinions; and this would give her, maybe, a last

chance. Also," he said, "I'd like something else to happen. This is Wednesday. On Friday evening, Henri Descouings is usually at the Sigourneys'; he plays whist with the old women, and sometimes chess with the old man. I'd like you to come on that night. Stop casually, and ask for me. When they learn it's you, I know they'll be greedy to have

Denis opened a window and asked what the message was. The man read it: Denis was asked to make his way at once to New Brunswick.



you in. It will be like manna falling in the desert of Pine Street; it will give the spinsters substance for conversation that will last for weeks." He paused, looking inquiringly at Denis. "You haven't seen old Descoings, I believe?"

"No," said Denis.

"You'll probably be seeing a good deal of him in the future, so an advance view, so to call it, may have an advantage to it."

"That is so possible," said Denis, "that I'll be there. What hour would be best?"

"Let me see, now." Monselet pursed his lips and considered. "Old Henri usually appears at about half-past eight. There is conversation until nine, when the whist or chess begins. At half-past ten his carriage appears, and he goes. . . . Let us say half-past nine. Things would be established by that time; but there would still be an hour for any use you might care to make of it."

ON the morning after Gerard Monselet's visit, Denis was told a mounted messenger had paused outside for a word with him. The young man was dressing at the time, so he opened a window and asked to know what the message was. The man rode up under the window, took a folded paper from his saddle-bag and read it in a loud voice. It was a line or two only—from Thistlewate. Denis was asked to make his way at once to the county seat at New Brunswick. At the courthouse the Counselor would be waiting to receive him.

The young man ordered his horse to be saddled, and after a hasty breakfast started on the road to New Brunswick. At the courthouse he found Counselor Thistlewate in close conference with two learned gentlemen, a tableful of records and seal-bearing documents between them.

"This," said Thistlewate to the gentleman, "is Denis Abernathy, grandson of the late Simon Abernathy."

Denis shook hands with the justices, and sat down. There followed a good deal of conversation, based upon the papers, some of which the young man recognized as those he'd turned over to Thistlewate the day before, though a number of others were new to him. The result of the talk was that the judges declared themselves quite satisfied that the Denis Abernathy now before them was the Denis Abernathy mentioned in the records submitted, and that they undoubtedly would, after a reasonable space of time, so declare him to be to all interested persons.

This news, as such things will, almost instantly circulated abroad; and in the course of the evening, Denis had a visit from Kipper.

"I knew it would turn out so," said the horse surgeon as he sat down and put his beaver hat upon the floor beside him. "There has been a deal of whispering—that the courts would pay no attention to you, that you would have no place in the firm, no matter what the law did about you."

At the time Denis had turned over his records to Thistlewate, he'd caught up some things out of the Counselor's conversation that were very like what Kipper had said: a phrase here and there, an expression—small things that told him the attorney was not without doubts.

"I could wish," said Kipper, "that you'd be able to fit into your grandfather's place without any bother. Then you could take hold of a good many things that have been slack this long time, and getting more and more so."

There were the horses. Kipper said he mentioned these because he knew most about them. A dozen years before, the teams had been grand stock. Strong-backed, with powerful legs and wonderful pluck, they were the pride of the wagoners and the stablemen along the road. Old Simon had always selected and bought his own horses; he had a natural eye for them, and knew a good one at sight. Not that he trusted altogether to this, however. Before he'd put his money down, he'd go over the animal point by point; he'd know its age, its bones and thews, its hoofs—its disposition. He'd look into its eyes; if they were dull, he'd turn the beast back. He desired an eye that had fire

in it, for without that look of life, you'd be buying a horse that would fail you when you needed him most.

"He liked Morgans," said Kipper. "His belief in their stanchness was fixed. But he wasn't limited to them. For hauling great loads you must have toughness: the Morgans had that, but sometimes the best of them lacked something in weight. He'd buy no horse, no matter what its other qualities were, that weighed less than twelve hundred pounds. In a beast of that size, he'd say, you not only had solid substance but a quick step as well."

"His opinion was that the Morgan, especially the type of Morgan they breed in Vermont, made the best coach horses; also that it wouldn't be possible to mount a heavy cavalry regiment better than with horses of this kind. But when it came to the straining cargoes carried in the big land ships," said Kipper, "he showed his excellent sense by standing the Vermonts aside and putting his eye upon the Conestogas."

"Good beasts," said Denis. "Stolid, but durable."

"They are the best of their kind," agreed Kipper. "But the old man mostly liked them because of their size. They filled his eye, as you might say. Some of them as tall as seventeen hands; and few of them under fifteen hundred-weight. That," said Kipper in high admiration, "is a race that has broken more harnessmakers' hearts, and more harness leather, than any other in the country."

"From what you said a few moments ago, the standard of horses belonging to Moreau, Descoings & Abernathy has fallen away a good deal."

"Maybe more than that," said Kipper. "From the time the old man stopped being active, the teams have been only the shadow of what they once were. There are fewer horses, with less power per horse," said Kipper. "Also the stables, harness, and sheds, are in poor condition."

"I'd have thought someone would have known enough to prevent that," Denis said.

"Dacre looked after things. A hard-working man; but he doesn't know horses, nor traffic, nor the things that're likely to happen on the turnpike. And he can't handle the men who drive the teams and handle the freight."

"I see," said Denis.

"That would be your branch of the business," said Kipper. "And you're going to have your hands full when you take hold of it. It's all going to bother you, but most of your trouble will be Pursell."

"Pursell?" said Denis, a new look in his eye.

"He's now the biggest teamster on the road," Kipper said. "He's a pretty solid man; and he's got money, equipment and experience."

"How long has he been on the road?" asked Denis. "It seems to me I've heard of him."

"He's been going up and down between Amboy and Burlington for a good many years. A black-muzzled man, and as hard as flint," said Kipper. "He drove one of the teams for Moreau, Descoings & Abernathy in your father's time. He was a wagon boss afterward. It's something more than a dozen years ago that he went into business for himself."

"Pursell," Denis sounded the name. "Yes, I've heard of him, sure. But somehow, it seems to have been only lately."

"He's a rising man," said Kipper, nodding. "The kind that seem to make their way when things are hardest." There was a silence, then Kipper added: "As I say, he's going to be one of your troubles."

CHAPTER NINE

DENIS ABERNATHY crossed the bay after dark Friday evening; he strolled for some time about the crooked New York streets. He was in Pine Street at half-past nine, and was directed to the house of the Sigourneys by a watchman. It was a tall old mansion, grown shabby in its later and leaner years; there was a hitching-post at the curb, and a carriage block; the

stone steps were high and broad. Denis lifted the knocker fastened to the door and dropped it gently.

An old colored manservant in a tailed coat and a waistcoat with many white buttons opened the door.

"Yes suh," he said.

"Mr. Monselet?" said Denis.

"Yes suh. Would you be pleased to give your name?"

"Abernathy."

"Kindly walk in, Mr. Abernathy. And take a chair"—indicating a huge chair with faded upholstery. "I'll tell Mr. Monselet you're here."

Denis waited. There was the remains of a fire in a broken grate; the floor of the wide hall was covered with a shabby rug; the decorations on the wall were time-stained; the lamps were dim. There was some delay, and then a door opened and Monselet appeared.

"Glad to see you," he said as they shook hands. "I was careful to be so placed," he continued in a low voice, "that they heard your name when the man came in. They are eager to see you; old Descoings as much as the others, though he does not show it nearly so much."

The room in which Denis found himself a moment later was large and high-ceilinged. Its polished floor was covered with rugs, faded and worn; there were marks upon the walls where pictures had once hung; candles burned in tall brass holders; a spinet that seemed to have been open for years stood near a wide fireplace which yawned blackly and in which billets crackled with an attempt at cheerfulness.

Two old men sat over a chessboard. Denis knew Henri Descoings instantly as they got up—slender and tall and old, wavering but stately, his wrinkled face set with a studied patrician coldness. His clothes fitted his long body perfectly; he wore an old-fashioned white frill at his throat, the frill fastened by a large jewel. There was a heavy gold chain across his waistcoat; his shirtfront was set with ruby studs, and there were rings upon his fingers. As Denis looked at him, something Owen had once said came into his mind.

"They were shopkeepers originally," Owen had said. "And probably earnest, hard-working people. It was before the Revolution in France, the time of dress and foppery; and Henri thought to be like the quality. But I've often wondered what way he made, for his love of jewels must have made him look like a pawnbroker."

There were two old women, sisters—spare and dry, in faded finery, and with covetous eyes. The male Sigourney was a red-faced, big man with a round, almost entirely bald head. He was younger than his sisters, and his deafness seemed to have made him suspicious and irritable; he had inflamed, quick-glancing eyes, and there was a dirty expression constantly about the corners of his mouth.

"Denis Abernathy," said Monselet, presenting the young man. "Hester Sigourney," he said to Denis, "and Drusilla. Also Felix Sigourney. And one whom you will perhaps see a good deal of from now on: Henri Descoings."

The sharp eyes of the two spinsters pecked at Denis like the beaks of ill-tempered birds. Felix Sigourney, as he nodded, had the look of a man who'd have been better pleased with his chess problem. Old Descoings looked at Denis attentively and bowed with a cold politeness.

"I am pleased," he said in precise tones. "Though at the countinghouse we'd expected to see you long before this."

"My time has been much taken up," said Denis, with equal coldness of manner.

"One day, several weeks ago, I'm told, you were there," said Henri, holding himself very erect.

"To see my grandfather," said Denis. "I'd just arrived in Perth Amboy, and had come to do that."

"Love of family," said Drusilla, looking like a bitter old magpie. "It's such an amazing thing! We forget everything else."

"It's a tie that holds where nothing else could," said Hester. "That's a thought I often have about our own lit-



Denis was in Pine Street at half-past nine, and was directed to the house of the Sigourneys by a watchman.

tle household. We three have kept together these many years,"—looking balefully at Felix and then at Drusilla,—"very attached and very devoted."

Henri Descoings seemed annoyed at these interruptions; but he held his even tone as he once more spoke to Denis.

"I was shocked and disturbed by Simon's end," he said. "It filled my mind with misgivings. And they have continued with me during the weeks that have passed since then."

He paused as though expecting Denis to say something; but as the young man did not, he proceeded, his cold, valuing gaze as fixed as before.

"We had been together a long time, Simon and I. He was a very worthy person," said Henri with the stately air of one praising a sturdy servitor. "He was a man of force, and controlled his people well. When age began to overtake him— Well," said Henri, "perhaps we'd best not speak of that. He's dead; and it probably would be as well to close the book on his earlier qualities."

There was something in this—an implication was laid down—which made Denis Abernathy's blood stir. His eyes narrowed as he looked at the old man. However, it was at that moment that Hester Sigourney said:

"Can you not all sit down; it'd be so much more comfortable."



"Our grand-niece is with us," said Hester. . . . "She's pretty, in a sort of way. But so stupid!"

"And Mr. Abernathy," said Drusilla, "will sit with us. We are so pleased to have you here," she said to Denis. "We've often spoken of you."

The two old shrews sat upon a sofa in a candlelight which caused their faces to fall into sharp, eager lines. Denis sat at one end of this, his eyes still upon Henri Descoings, who now, with his gold ornaments sparkling, stood with his back to the fire.

"If your father had remained with us," said Henri, fingering the heavy links of his gold chain, "I think all may have been well. Owen was of stable character, and would have seen and prevented many of the things that arose to plague us."

"He had a good deal of resolution," agreed Denis. "And when you say he would have noted and stopped a good many things that seem to have happened after he went away, you may be right."

The old harpies giggled at this, and Drusilla said:

"Owen was so stalwart, and so full of energy."

"And he so liked horses!" said Hester. "I think he must have lived in the stable. Isn't it odd, how nature so designs some people for their way in life!"

Felix Sigourney had sat with one hand cupped to his ear to hear what was being said.

"I did not catch the name," he said in a loud voice. "Who is this young man?"

"An Abernathy!" shrilled Hester. "Owen's son."

"Oh, yes," said Felix, the dirty smirk more deeply tooled about his mouth than before. "Young Abernathy. I was acquainted with your family," he shouted at Denis. "Very well. On both sides. Many a bottle of wine I drank with your grandfather. I don't mean the one who has just been choked. I mean your mother's father. You never saw him, I suppose. Of the name of Craufurd. And a rare sort of a hell-devil, too. Old Abernathy wasn't his kind at all. Too dour and moody, and locked his money up too tightly.

I understand you didn't know very much of him, either. Well, that shouldn't be any occasion for grief. You haven't missed much."

"Felix, please!" remonstrated Drusilla, her eyes gleaming with gratified malice.

"Craufurd got rid of his money freely," roared Felix. "But then, why not? He got it easily enough." The man polished his bald head with the palm of his hand, and laughed. "I've heard it said in the taverns that many of the voyages he made never went down on the books. A good companion, though rather free with a knife when he'd had too much to drink. He could tell tales of his adventures that'd set the whole of a coffee-room a-laughing."

"Don't mind Felix," said Hester to Denis. "He will continue to mention past times. And being deaf, he's hard to make understand that his conversation is not always agreeable."

"It has reached me," said Henri Descoings to Denis, "that the courts have practically approved the evidence you've produced to show your identity."

"I went to New Brunswick yesterday," said Denis. "Mr. Thistlewate requested it."

"Ah, yes! Thistlewate." There was a fleeting look of what was very like hate in old Henri's face. "Still active. Quite a person. But take care!"—smiling now, and his voice like velvet. "Do not put too much confidence in his suggestions. Your grandfather did that, and it injured him more than he knew."

"I spoke with the judges," said Denis. "At the county seat"—as Henri's brow lifted inquiringly. "They were agreed upon the papers I'd sent them. There were also others which they'd requested in Lancaster and Pittsburgh and other places."

"It's in the law, I believe," said Henri, "that a certain time must elapse before matters of this sort are closed. To give opportunity to other possible claimants."

"They told me of that."

"For myself," said Henri Descoings, "I'd require no more than a look at you to prove you were Simon Abernathy's grandson. You are his second self."

"When I heard your father meant to marry Jerry Craufurd's daughter," shouted Felix to Denis, "I was surprised. I wondered how old Simon would take it. He was, in spite of his never darkening the doors of a church, a kind of a damned Presbyterian: always wanting to be paid. Craufurd owed a good deal of money. I know very well the last ship he had—"

"Felix, do stop!" screamed Drusilla joyfully. "Such a memory!" she said to Denis. "He never forgets anything."

FELIX had caught her gestures, and paused. And now he said to Denis: "It wouldn't surprise me if Simon held the marriage against your father. For they say he kicked him out at last." He snickered. "A tough-minded man—never tolerated anything that wasn't his own sort."

"Felix never liked Simon," said Hester to Denis. "Indeed, I'm sorry to say there weren't many that did. Simon was violent. The men who worked under him were—"

"Hester," interrupted Drusilla, "maybe Mr. Abernathy does not care to hear that. And it was such a long time ago. Felix," went on Drusilla to Denis, "once knew both your grandfathers—intimately. At that time he was in the brokerage business and also speculated in marine insurances. And of course he was in the way of hearing and knowing quite a bit. But we never permit him to mention how Simon Abernathy treated his wagoners. There are some things"—her hand touching Denis' sleeve like a poisoned claw—"as Henri suggested a few moments ago, that had best be forgotten."

"The land freights under Simon's direction," said Henri Descoings to Denis, "have faded, I think, beyond repair. I don't know what he said to you on the day of your visit, but he had certain, what I might venture to call, hallucinations. And I have no doubt but that state of mind had a

good deal to do with his misadventures in various departments of the business. So it would be as well if you put his complaining, if any, out of your mind."

"His affairs," said Denis, "are of course now my affairs. And my affairs are in the hands of Counselor Thistlewate. In due course he will bring them forward."

Henri Descoings smiled; but it had the effect of a glimmer of light trying to penetrate a dense shadow.

"Thistlewate," he said, "is something like my own age. I gave up most of my active affairs sometime since; and it's about time he did the same. There are younger ones, and cleverer ones to be had, if you think you need an attorney. In that selfsame town of New Brunswick, which you mentioned a few minutes ago, there is the firm of Drugget & Files. Those are young men, and able ones. Be advised, and see them; or if you please, someone like them. Do not confuse your prospects by following the suggestions of a fat old man who should be spending his days dozing beside the fire."

"Counselor Thistlewate, at this time at any rate, seems very competent. But we shall see. There may come a time when I'll change my mind."

"I trust so," said Henri Descoings. "It will be money in your pocket if you do."

Here the shrews broke in once more, chatting with the vengefulness of a pair of starving crows. Denis could see they hated him—hated his name and all that had been at any time attached to it. They smiled their pale smiles, and nodded their lean heads: their narrow brains searched crookedly for anything they thought might injure his self-respect, or his will to do.

"Our grand-niece is with us," said Hester, "for a week or more. A delightful girl. Or perhaps"—with a bitter look at Monselet, who was speaking to Henri—"Gerard has told you something else. He is a very thoughtless young man, and brings a good deal into his conversation."

"He's mentioned her," said Denis.

"He'd be sure to. For she's seldom out of his mind," Drusilla said in a low tone. "The Monselets have very little of their own," she added. "And he's of a branch of them that have scarcely anything. We've heard his family is mad to have him marry Lois. And,"—shaking her fleshless old head,—*"maybe he will, in the end. She's a fool, as most girls are, and will not listen to anything sensible that's told her."*

"She's pretty, in a sort of way," said Hester. "But so stupid! I sometimes wonder how so much nonunderstanding could be crowded into one head! Of course, her father's people are rather low-caste. There is a good deal of Spanish in them; and we've heard it whispered there is also some Portuguese."

"When you were spoken of," said Drusilla to Denis, "I was astonished at her dislike. Of course, we know of the things that are said about Simon, but that she should be in such a temper about you, surprised us."

"When she began to talk, I didn't know what to say," Hester told him. "I'm not accustomed to such things. A girl in my day was expected to use discretion."

Henri Descoings had, by this time, taken his place at the chessboard once more; and Gerard Monselet approached Denis.

"Lois is in the next room," he told him. "She's been writing some letters, but she's finished with them now, and I think she'd like to talk with you."

Denis arose. He nodded and smiled at the ancient shrews, and went with the young Creole into an adjoining room. Drusilla and Hester looked at each other, malice in their dim eyes.

"Up on his feet instantly at mention of her," said Drusilla. "And she can't bear him. What a fool!"

"No one," said Hester, "could look so much like Simon Abernathy and not be one. It was Simon's bluster and hard looks that made people think him extraordinary. I never thought he was."

"All men are stupid," stated Drusilla. "Henri Descoings looks as though he might not be, but when I see him forever trying to act, or stand, or talk like what's-his-name, I'm reminded that looks can be very deceiving."

Hester looked with sour enjoyment at the stately figure of Henri meditating over the pieces on the chessboard, one finger touching his temple. His jewel-clasped frill, his well-fitting coat, his gold ornaments, made her bad old teeth chatter with glee.

"You mean he thinks he resembles Bonaparte," she said to Drusilla.

"You have such an excellent memory, haven't you, my dear," jeered Drusilla. "Always trying to set one straight. The person he thinks he looks like is Metternich; and at an impressive moment. I think it must be from a historical painting he's seen somewhere. I've heard it said of him that he'd rather look imposing in a business transaction than have it turn out profitably."

LOIS MOREAU was turning over the yellowed pages of an old music-book when the two young men came into the room. She looked up with a smile.

"I heard your voice," she said to Denis. "I did not go in because Gerard asked me not to."

"With Felix bawling in his customary way, and the two ladies thrusting and stepping back like a pair of old sergeants on a fencing-floor," said Monselet, "I thought it best to arrange a few moments at least out of eye and ear-shot of them."

"Will you sit down?" said the girl to Denis. "I want to speak to you while Gerard is close by," she said when they were settled. "He was present the first time we met. And having heard what I said then, it is only just to you that he should hear what I have to say now."

Denis nodded.

"Whatever you think best," he said, "will do very well with me."

Her face wore a troubled look at this.

"I'd hoped," she said, "that you'd take the matter more seriously. I'd like you to do that, for I'm afraid I said some things to you that evening that were not well-considered. And if I hurt you, I want to say I'm sorry."

"You were excited that night," said Denis, looking at her quietly. "Things had been told you that took you by surprise, and which you had no means of weighing."

"I hadn't," she said. "But I should have thought of that. Gerard mentioned it; and more than once. But I paid no attention. I was prejudiced. That began on the night our horses acted so badly in front of the wagoners' tavern. I saw you fighting, with a crowd gathered around. I hate such things, and am afraid of them. Gerard, when I spoke of it to him a few days ago, told me you'd tried to help us, and were attacked because of it."

"Of course," said Denis, "the thing wasn't a pretty one to see."

"I have a feeling that everything I've done was wrong," she said. "And I hope you will forgive me."

"None of it would have amounted to much with me if I hadn't been so strangely situated," said Denis. "That bothered me, I'll admit. But we'll forget about it, shall we?"

"I've been frightened. So many things have happened. The murder!" she said, her face quite pale. "It was so terrible!"

"Try to forget that, especially," said Denis.

"But I had such cruel thoughts of your grandfather. And afterward I found he was so old, and ill, and helpless!"

"On the afternoon you mentioned just now, I saw him for what was really the first time," said Denis. "He told me some things that were not clear to me. But that his life was in danger he pointed out quite plainly."

"He knew it?" she said, her wide-open eyes fixed upon him.

"He told me attempts had been made upon him at three different times," said Denis. Monselet exclaimed at this;

the girl put her hands before her eyes as though to hide some dreadful thing. "But," added Denis, "he'd not at any time been able to make out who the villain was."

"And was there nothing," Lois asked, "that would suggest a reason for these attempts?"

"I hesitate to say this," said Denis, "but there was a possible reason. My grandfather, as you've heard, had grown to suspect that the business was being mishandled—that this had been going on for some years. As complaints of the same sort of thing had been coming from New Orleans, he went there and made an investigation. The result was that he spoke to Henri Descoings on his return; he said definitely that there was rascality going on in the firm and that he meant to get to the bottom of it." There was another pause, and then the young man added: "It was only a little time afterward that the first attempt was made to murder him."

Lois Moreau sat rigid in her chair, looking first at one of the young men and then at the other; the fright that had been in her eyes a few moments before had frozen into a sort of horror. But before she could speak, the door opened and Hester Sigourney appeared.

"I rapped," she said, "but I suppose you were all so—" Then she paused, her eyes on Lois. "My dear," she said, her voice lifting sharply, "whatever is the matter?"

"It's nothing," said the girl.

"You look as if you'd seen a ghost." Then the lean old hand turned toward the young men. "What have you been saying to her?"

"We've been going over a few things, that's all," said Monselet.

The old woman did not look at all satisfied with this; but she said to Denis:

"Henri has sent for his carriage. He will be going in a short while, and he wonders if you know there is only one more boat to Perth Amboy tonight. If you are crossing, he'll be glad to take you to the slip."

SOMETIME later the wheels of the carriage were heard on the stones before the door, and Denis arose.

"I'm glad you came," said Lois Moreau as she bade him good-by. "I've been very anxious, and your visit has helped me." She looked at him for a moment. "Gerard has told you, I think, that we are going west to meet my father?"

"Yes, he has. It's not the best time of the year for the journey, but the weather has been good and you may get through very pleasantly." He took the hand she offered him. "Before you return to the South," he said, "I hope your father's business will bring you in this direction once more."

She smiled at him.

"It isn't likely," she said. "Not after what has happened. My father will understand, after hearing what I have to tell him, that his affairs here will require more than the hand of a venturesome daughter."

"There is always Mr. Thistlewate," said Denis.

"Yes, of course. But," said the girl, "I am not sure my father will greatly care to do anything. He is that way. Of late he's been interested in the commerce of the river. And he has been so impatient with his seagoing vessels that he may dispose of what's left of them and give his attention to the back country altogether."

"I hope he does not do that," said Denis. "Not yet, at least. Speak to him; try to bring back his confidence. Things have been going badly here; but there will be a change."

As she looked at him she noted the firm set of his face, and the quiet security in his fine eyes. And she felt she wanted to believe what he said. But she found she could not—quite. For the natures of people made them so difficult to judge. Denis Abernathy was so confident of manner, he seemed so full of purpose that, looking at him, one thought of him as full of power—of body, mind and spirit.

But she could not forget that evening at the President Monroe Tavern when, in the face of the hectoring threats of Louis Descoings, he'd turned with down-held head, and walked away.

When she spoke to the young man, she said:

"I will tell him what you say. But I find myself hoping he'll not listen. For I'm afraid what has been going on here is so well established that none of us will be able to change it. And what you've suggested about your grandfather's death has, I'll admit, frightened me. The Moreaus are strangers here; and I think we had better remain so."

WHEN Denis had taken leave of them all, he rolled away in Henri Descoings's carriage. The old man in his tall hat, his elegant shoulders draped in the folds of a fine woolen shawl, sat back against the cushions. "This girl—Moreau's daughter," Henri said, "is excitable. Most women lack steadiness, and should never be entrusted with business matters. It was a mistake to permit her to come here. It will do no good."

"As I understand it," Denis said, "she is dissatisfied."

"With what?" asked Henri, his eyes shifting toward the young man, but his head keeping its distant pose.

"With the business. From what I've heard, her father is also dissatisfied. Things have gone badly with them at New Orleans; they are low in funds; and they'd like to see matters improve."

"The Moreaus know very little about the handling of money," said Henri. "And less about the handling of a business. A prince, with the revenues of two provinces, spends less than they do."

"That, as I see it, hardly answers their complaint."

"What is the complaint?" asked Henri Descoings coldly.

"She spent some hours with you a week or two ago, I believe," replied Denis. "If you'll go back over that conversation, you might get a better answer than I could give you."

"She was greatly disturbed," said the elder Descoings. "She used a great many words; but her meanings were vague. She seemed constantly trying to point something out—something she couldn't see, and apparently didn't understand."

"I have not yet come to the place in what are to be our affairs where I can offer things for your consideration," said Denis. "But when I do, I may be just as vague, and maybe a good deal more insistent than she was."

Henri Descoings smiled; he gestured with a thin hand.

"It is to be regretted," he said, "that you saw Simon and came under his influence before giving yourself the opportunity of speaking to us. I knew he'd sent for you—"

"Did he tell you?" interrupted Denis.

"I think not," said Henri, still smiling. "Toward the last he confided in us very little. As his health grew worse, he became more and more secretive."

"Maybe," said Denis stubbornly, "you'd not mind telling me how you knew?"

"Things get about," said Henri. "In the counting-room we have all sorts of information come to us—frequently trifling things; we make no effort to keep track of them."

"I do not know how dissatisfied the Moreaus have been," said Denis, his eyes narrowing over the evasion of this reply, "but it could not possibly have been more so than my grandfather."

"Simon," said Henri, "was not a merchant. He had little comprehension of the way of business, as a large house transacts it. In his earlier days he seemed to understand this, and was satisfied to leave it to those who had experience. But as I think I said to you awhile ago, he changed a great deal in his view of things. So much so that I began to think his mind had weakened."

Henri Descoings' thin fingers stroked his rings; they twined themselves in the links of the heavy gold chain; his pose had all the impressive concentration of the Metternich portrait he was said to admire. He had, he said, thought

highly of Simon Abernathy. He could not mention that too often. Henri's father had noted him first—a man with a great train of pack-horses; a violent man, but very thorough in his trade, one who accomplished much and asked little time to do it in. He was taken into the business and was of splendid use. Owen, Simon's son, was then a boy; a heavy-browed, strong boy, who seemed forever stooping under a threat of some sort. The Descoings were not surprised when Owen, after he grew up and married, went away.

"Simon," said Henri Descoings, "was priceless. But hard to get on with! When he finally became dissatisfied, we, without saying it openly, tried to have him retire. But our efforts seemed to excite his suspicion. There was no way of dealing with him, no way of bringing the situation to an end. And so it dragged on, year after year, getting constantly worse."

But now it was done with. The old man was gone; and they were grieved, and wished it could have been otherwise. However, with the change of the pieces on the board, so to put it, came an opportunity of opening a way to a settlement.

"You are young," said Henri Descoings; "you have your life before you. Useful and interesting. It may be"—his eyes upon Denis—"your grandfather suggested, in his talk with you, that you take his place in the firm, in the event of his death?"

"No," said Denis; "he did not. Any thoughts on that subject have been my own."

"I see." Henri turned one of the rings round and round on his finger. "You have been thinking of it, then?"

"I have," said the young man. "Though I hadn't meant to open the subject just yet."

"My information concerning you," said Henri, "shows that you have a group of fine teams, and are modestly prospering with them. I was pleased to learn this"—nodding his stately head. "And it gave me an idea." There was a pause, and then he proceeded: "At the time we thought your grandfather might retire, the firm had fixed upon a sum of money which was considered to be a generous price for his holdings. It may be," said Henri, "that this sum could be passed over to you."

Denis was silent. And during this, the carriage came to a halt.

"The ferry slip, suh," said the coachman. "And the boat's waiting."

Denis opened the door, and stepped out.

"Many thanks to you, Mr. Descoings, for your kindness," he said.

"It's been a pleasure," said Henri, with fine courtesy. And then he added, "Of course your answer to what I've said can await your convenience."

"In a short time; as soon as I've looked into things, I'll speak to you," said Denis.

CHAPTER TEN

NEXT day, Denis Abernathy conferred with Thistlewate.

"The actual money left by your grandfather comes to something over forty thousand. Also, there is some real property," said the Counselor, "which, I think, will represent a tidy sum. And he had a few investments in steam vessels which I'd not known of until I began to go through the papers. So far"—and he looked at Denis over the top of his glasses—"I have come upon little that's interesting as regards the inwardness of the business; and nothing at all that showed what place or authority he had in it. It will take some weeks to go through his papers and estimate their value. Perhaps a month may pass before we can be quite definite."

But Denis was not disposed to wait. Ideas were newly astir in his mind; his thoughts were fixed on the highway



"We expected to see you long before this," said Henri.

across the Appalachians, on the rivers, on the forests and plains beyond them. And on the great Conestoga wagons with the belled teams of strong horses.

He now had forty thousand dollars! A sound sum of money. Also he had the small fleet of land ships left him by Owen. To these, he had a knowledge of the west country and its possibilities. Above all, he had Owen's vision of transportation. Fixed in his mind were hundreds of narrow trails leading through forest places, across deserts, or grassy plains, through mountain passes; and all converging upon the places where the teams or the steamers were waiting for them. Furs, timber, gold, copper, all the riches of a land upon which the trader had scarcely laid his hand. The produce of a vast region of the world would be moving toward the markets. Roads would open for the never-ending cavalcades of profitable things. The wagons would travel in clouds of dust like advancing armies. The rivers would churn with the eager impulse of many steamers.

So, filled with thoughts like these, he next day went to the countinghouse of Moreau, Descoings & Abernathy. After some delay, in which there was a good deal of subdued talk among the clerks, much glancing and uncertainty, he was shown into a high-ceilinged office where Henri Descoings stood with his back to a fireplace, as stately, as carefully attired, his many jewels sparkling as they'd done on the evening at Sigourneys'.

He bowed after the Metternich manner; he rubbed his palms together softly: there was a smile about his lips, but his rather close-set eyes had a crooked look.

"I had been expecting you," he said. "Some day soon; though not quite as promptly as this."

"I'm afraid I said some things to you that evening that were not well-considered," said Lois. "If I hurt you, I want to say I'm sorry."



"We have a matter that it'd be best to settle," said Denis. "I've made up my mind it'll gain nothing by waiting."

"Quite true," said Henri agreeably. "Very true, indeed." He touched a bell. "We shall have my son, Louis Descoings, in. He is very helpful on such occasions." He nodded and smiled at Denis. "You have met him, I think?"

There was mockery in the man's look; and Denis felt all the resolutions he'd built up to make this an occasion for quiet, shrewd dealing, breaking under him.

"Yes," he said. "I have seen him, I think: twice. His methods are not like yours. If I remember, he does a good deal of bawling and striding up and down."

Henri Descoings still smiled. He seemed pleased at the color of this answer.

"Louis," he said gently, "is impetuous. But one should not be deceived by that. He is an excellent trader; he knows ships and merchandise and men; and he makes few mistakes."

Here a clerk came into the room, and Henri Descoings said:

"Ask Mr. Louis Descoings if it is convenient for him to speak to Mr. Abernathy." The clerk departed, and Henri fingered the links of gold chain strung across his waistcoat. "I am in hopes that we shall get your affairs here settled so that you can give your attention to more profitable ones. You should never have been sent for. It was the selfishness of a distraught old man. He had never given any attention to you. I'm sure he did not know if you were alive or dead. But when the time came to use you, you were his first thought."

"Use me in what way?" asked Denis.

Henri shrugged elegantly.



"Who can say? As I've said, we have seldom, in late years, been able to follow the contortions of your grandfather's mind."

Here Evans Dacre came into the room.

"I beg that you'll excuse me," he said, bowing his benevolent head to both, "but Mr. Louis Descoings is pressingly engaged just now. It may be that in a half-hour, or perhaps an hour, he will be free."

Henri turned one of the rings about on his finger, and looked at Denis, his eyes partly closed.

"Perhaps you'd care to take a seat in one of the outer rooms," he said. "Very often a half-hour or an hour passes swiftly enough."

Denis turned his back upon Henri, and said to Dacre: "I have not yet seen the teams or any of the hauling equipment. And I think I shall look at them now, if you'll be good enough to direct me."

"With great pleasure," said Dacre.

The man passed out; but Denis paused in the doorway and said to Henri, who still stood before the fire:

"Mr. Descoings, you have seen fit to put a studied affront upon me, and I think I'd better speak plainly to you. In one hour's time I'll be back, and I shall expect your son to be here; and I shall expect him to be ready to receive me. If he is not, I promise you to hunt through the place for him, and when found, I'll beat his bullet head against the wall." He stood looking at Henri for a moment, and then added: "You are an old man, and if it were not for that, I'd gladly do the same for you."

As Denis closed the office door behind him, Dacre, who stood just outside it, said to him mildly:

"I don't think an offense was meant, Mr. Abernathy."

"At any rate," said Denis, "these people have mannerisms I don't like. And that was serving notice that I don't mean to try to like them."

Outdoors, Dacre pointed to the stables, set back a hundred yards from the waterside.

"But," he told Denis, "I'm afraid you'll find little there. That portion of the business has not been profitable this long time, and is being abandoned. However, as you are interested in it, I'll walk to the buildings with you and point out what we consider—"

But Denis interrupted him.

"I think," he said, "I'd rather study matters alone. Thanking you, however, for your willingness."

"Quite so," said Dacre, smiling and nodding. "After all, I suppose that will be best. After you've viewed things, if you want any further information, I shall be at your service."

THE buildings of Moreau, Descoings & Abernathy were of brick and stone—low and heavy-looking; and meant to last many years. A mast was stepped at one end of the long, many-windowed countinghouse, and flew the company's flag of orange and white. At one side of the stables were the wagon sheds; then there were two small detached buildings, a harness shop, and the forge used by the farriers who looked to the horses' feet.

But the young man, as he paused before the stables, saw surprising evidences of neglect. The woodwork was unpainted, windows were broken; stable litter, wagon bodies and parts, seemingly discarded, lay about. There was a silence about the place; it seemed to have been given up to rust and decay. He approached the door of the harness shop and looked in. A small man with a clipped white beard was working at a bridle.

"Good morning," said Denis.

The man looked up; quick interest came into his eyes.

"Good morning," he answered. And then, after another look: "You'll be young Abernathy, I think?"

"Yes," said Denis. He glanced around the place. "There doesn't seem to be much going on."

The man put down his awl, and rubbed his fingers with a nubbin of wax.

"Very little," he said. "There's been nothing here to take the eye this long time; and now that the old man's gone I'm thinking there'll be less."

Denis sat down on a bench inside the door.

"Things seem to be moldering and falling apart," he said. "I hadn't thought it'd be that way."

The harnessmaker drew the wax down the length of a thread; and he nodded.

"For myself, I never thought I'd see the day," he said. "It was a grand place once; nothing so active in this part of the country. But when Simon took his hand from it, it began to die. For," he said, "what would a man brought up in a countinghouse, like Dacre, know of six-horse teams and freight wagons, and such?"

"Not a great deal," said Denis.

"Before his time I had two men working here with me; and we did no more than the repairs. There were six smiths in the farriers' shop to see that the horses were comfortable and stout on their feet; and there were as many more at the other end of the haul. Yes, those were great days, sir, when the old man was really up and about, and seeing to things. The stables were crowded with grand horses. A half score wagons would be backed up on the wharves at one time, taking on their loads. And there wasn't a mile of road between here and the Delaware, at any time between sun and sun, that didn't have an Abernathy wagon on it.

"But after Dacre brought his smile among us we began to break up. For you can't smile power into teams, nor willingness into men," said the old harnessmaker. "They need more than that."

"But the business," said Denis: "What became of that? Such things don't vanish into the air."

"It was at that time that Pursell began pushing along," said the harnessmaker. "Someone had to do the hauling,

and there he was, glad of the business: and growing in it, and getting stronger every day."

"I've heard of him," Denis said. "Lately: and, I think, some time ago."

"Like as not you have. He's spoken of in many places. Pursell's the kind that follows in the track made by someone else, but careful not to make the same mistakes. He's always studying something; and always watching. I'd say he'll make a fine sum of money before he's done."

After leaving the harness shop, Denis went to the stables. They were damp, sunless, and slovenly: the few horses in the stalls looked worn and unhappy; doors hung upon faulty hinges. In the grain room the bins were broken; the grain looked unclean and unfit; in the lofts he found the roof had opened in places; the rain had dripped in, and the hay was moldy and sodden. He had several of the horses brought outdoors, and he looked at them. They were poor in flesh, their coats rough and dirty. Also, they were animals that had never been fitted, in bone or build, for the heavy work of the Amboy road.

SOMETHING more than an hour had passed when Denis went back to the countinghouse. There was a bitter, heavy look in his face; his tread was measured like that of a man who'd definitely made up his mind.

As he entered the place, he was met by Dacre.

"I was hoping you'd return," the man said. "Mr. Louis has just gone into his father's office. I'll tell them you are here." He disappeared, and in a few moments stood beckoning Denis from the doorway of Henri's room.

Denis went in. He saw Henri at his writing-table, and Louis standing beside him.

"Excellently timed," said Henri. His look was filled with malice as he fixed it upon Denis. "Louis is here, so you'll not have to go searching for him as you were afraid you'd be forced to do."

"The object was stated to be a knocking of my head against the wall, I think," said Louis. "Well," with a laugh, "I've saved you something there, I think."

"You being here, I hope, does away with any necessity of that kind. So, if you don't mind, we'll forget it. At least for the time being."

"I do mind, and I'll not forget it," said Louis, his square face set with rage.

"Do as you please: it's all one to me. I owe you a few things, and some day—today would please me as well as any—I mean to repay them, no matter how good or bad your memory is."

There is no telling what action Louis would have taken in reply to this, for his neck and face were swollen with fury. But Henri arose commandingly, one jeweled hand lifted.

"No," he said. "There will be nothing like that." He looked at Denis. "I am surprised at the violence of your language," he said. "I had not expected it."

"What you expected," said Denis, "was the spectacle of me sitting on a bench at your door, my hat in my hand, patiently waiting. And now that I resent your attempt to belittle me, you complain of violence. You have been dealing with a helpless old man for so long you've forgotten that I'm quite a few years younger."

"I suggest," said Henri, "that you lower your voice. There is no need for shouting." He left the table, and paced up and down before the fire, his stateliness still with him. "I have heard," he said, "you have been inspecting the stables. If you have given them serious consideration, you must have some idea of how valueless they, and what they represent, are to the firm of Moreau, Descoings & Abernathy. As a matter of fact, the entire Abernathy interest in the firm has vanished. That is a thing," said Henri Descoings, "that Simon never understood. His mind was filled with illusions: he talked of rascality, of robbery. The conditions of our partnership seemed beyond his comprehension."

"Am I to understand," said Denis, "that your claim is that his interest in Moreau, Descoings & Abernathy only went as far as the limitations of the thing he brought into it?"

"We not only claim that, we can prove it," said Henri. "We have the papers, signed in the presence of witnesses, stating in plain words the terms of the agreement."

"I am sure," said Denis, "he had no such conception. If he had signed an agreement of that sort, don't you think he'd been aware of it?"

"I am not sure of that," said Henri, with enjoyment in his tones. "He was a headlong sort of person who had the contempt such people often have of written instruments."

"I shall require to see that paper," said Denis Abernathy. "Mr. Thistlewate will ask for it in due course."

"He'll find it tight and binding," said Louis Descoings, with a laugh. "Even that old mole will be able to dig nothing out of it that isn't there."

Denis saw the sign Henri Descoings made his son, and he recorded it in his mind. But he said:

"A few moments ago you mentioned your belief that the Abernathy interests in this firm had vanished. And as a proof of this you point to what remains of this interest. I have just spent an hour or more looking at the stables, at the stock, at all the things that had been done, and those that had not been done. The firm of Moreau, Descoings & Abernathy, as I've often heard, is close-working; it is careful, it wastes little. And yet I have been viewing the most wretched waste and neglect. I've been seeing things that could not be the result of even meager care. Looking at a matter of that sort," said Denis, "causes thought. And I have been asking myself why a concern noted for its watchfulness should permit a most profitable part of its business to fall so into decay."

"The old man," said Louis, "was not able to take care of it."

"That," said Denis, "is no answer. People often become ill; people die. But it does not follow that the affairs they've had in charge should be permitted to die with them."

"We placed the most trusted man in our employ in charge of the wagoning when he saw your grandfather was no longer able to get about," said Henri, stately, erect, indignant.

"You mean Dacre," said Denis. "I've been told he is a man who knows nothing of hauling, of horses, or of the road."

"Are you suggesting," said Henri, "that we have placed an inexperienced person in charge of our transportation branch in order to have it decay and become useless?"

"So far," said Denis, "I am suggesting nothing. I am merely asking questions. And fitting answers to some of yours. But the thing you have just mentioned could be true. Or, and this time I *will* make a suggestion, the intention might be one even more direct."

"Are you saying," cried Louis, his anger now too great for continued silence, "that we have—"

BUT his father held up one thin hand in a gesture that stopped him even then; the old man's eyes, fixed upon Denis, had the veiled fury of a viper.

"I am beginning to think," he said, "that you have some of your family's madness."

"You will find, as we go on, I have a great deal of it," said the young man. "Though I call it something else. On the day I talked with my grandfather, he told me that when he first went to you with accusations of robbery, you said he was mad. It seems to be a favorite reply of yours."

"I think," said Henri Descoings, "you had better leave."

"I shall be glad to do that," said Denis; "but not for another few moments. There have been some thoughts feeding each other in my mind during these last few weeks, but today, for the first time, they are turning out meanings I can make something of."



Illustrated by Maurice Bower

Denis drew in a long breath of content: Roads were places where he'd always felt free!

"Do not go too far!" said the younger Descoings. "I've taken more from you than I've ever taken from any person before."

Denis looked at Louis steadily.

"On one occasion," he said, "a short while after my grandfather left this room—and his errand was in some ways quite like my present one—there was an attempt made upon his life."

At this, without a word, Louis leaped at him; but as he came, Denis struck him, throwing him against the wall. He moved forward to strike again; but Dacre, who had entered swiftly at the first sound of violence, took him by the arm.

"A thing like this will be of no advantage to any of you," he said gently. "Self-control is a thing always to be recommended."

And now Denis found old Henri standing before him rigidly, white of face, his jeweled hand shaking as he motioned Denis away.

"First, a few more words," said Denis. "It may be there will be a repetition of the thing I mentioned a few moments ago. Now that my suspicions have been shown, my life also may be attempted."

"Be advised," said Dacre mildly. "Let there be nothing more."

"Very well," said the young man. But as he was turning away, he said to Henri:

"As I leave, I ask you to remember one thing: If there is an attempt made upon me, I shall know its source. And I'll not appeal to the law, Mr. Descoings. I'll take the matter into my own hands. And without delay."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

DENIS was again in Counselor Thistlewate's office, over the dried-fish merchant's in South Street, two days later. The old attorney sat at his table, upon which were heaped the papers of Simon Abernathy; his round face looked harassed and worn.

"There is nothing," he said. "Not a word that we can hang a hope upon."

"I did not expect proof of anything," said Denis. "The search made by the thief and assassin was too thorough for that. But I did think there might be a hint, or suggestion, that might lead us somewhere."

"I had hoped for just such a thing myself," said the Counselor; "and, given that, I'd have engaged to make some sort of mark with it. But, the whole matter is as bare as the palm of your hand."

But the word Denis had brought from the Descoings about the agreement Simon Abernathy had signed with them, was regarded by the Counselor as being not without promise.

"That," he said, "would be a wicked piece of chicanery if it exists, and I'd enjoy studying it."

"Do you think my grandfather would have signed a document giving him no more rights than that?"

"It is possible, just as that bedizened old file, Henri, told you; your grandfather had a contempt for written instruments. It is not," added the Counselor, "that I have any thought of forgery or any such devilment, for the Descoings are too able for a thing of that sort. What might be seen in the documents is an oversharpeness. I know Henri and his ways quite well; also, I knew his father, during whose time this agreement must have been drawn. And he was a damned old rogue who got great enjoyment out of entangling people. But, strangely enough," said Counselor Thistlewate, "the weakness of these two has always been in their own cleverness. Sharp practice, I think, so fascinated them that they could never resist it."

"Now," continued the old attorney, wagging a forefinger at Denis, "stress in a written instrument always attracts attention. That is what it is meant to do. But if it bears

constantly in one direction, the attention is apt to be unfavorable. And, as I've said, I'm hoping for some such fault in this bond of partnership they speak of. If they have been overclever, we may have a chance."

Denis Abernathy, at that moment, was not attracted by a future resting solely upon the wording of a business paper. And he said so. There were immediate matters that he could turn his hand to.

"But," protested the Counselor, "you do not intend to abandon action in this case."

"There is nothing that would induce me to do that," said Denis. "But I don't like the thought of waiting for results. There are things I have in mind that may force matters and turn up truths we might not be able to reach in any other way."

They talked for some time; and when Denis was about taking his leave, the Counselor said:

"Yesterday I had a visitor. Two visitors, in fact—Miss Moreau and young Monselet. They asked to be remembered to you, and wished you every success. They are on their way west to meet her father."

Denis felt a new emptiness in a world that had been none too full for him at its best. And he said:

"I knew they were going, and that it would be soon. But now that they have gone, I have a feeling of surprise."

"She's a fine girl," said the Counselor. "Spirited and hasty, to be sure, but a person to remember."

During the whole of that day Denis Abernathy felt that he must be up and about his business. The long road west, so it seemed, was beckoning as it had not beckoned before. There was haste in the thought of it; a sort of fever lifted out of it. And so he packed a canvas bag, made arrangements with the landlady at his tavern for storage of his chest and the keep of the roan horse; and the early chill of the next morning saw him atop the stage, wrapped in a big traveling cloak and facing toward the Delaware.

He sat beside the driver, his tall hat pulled well down on his head to prevent the muttering morning wind from carrying it away. The four well-conditioned coach horses trotted along easily, their iron-shod feet beating rhythmically on the hard-beaten road. Denis drew in a long breath of content. Roads were places where he'd always felt free; mile after mile they'd stretch away, open, inviting, and with experiences tempting one at every turn. Strong horses pulling in the harness, the broad-tired wheels rumbling, the body of the coach rocking, the dawn lighting the east, and night creeping reluctantly back from the margins of the way. Other coaches were met and passed, like ships on their way to various ports; huge wagons with their belled teams, their drivers perched high up under the canvas top, or astride the near wheel-horse. People going to places they were hoping for; huge bodies of freight going where it was needed; everyone cheerful and looking forward to a day, long and tiring perhaps, but which put distance behind them, mile after mile.

It was broad day, and the sun was warming a rollicking wind when the coach drew up at the inn where they were to have breakfast. The horses were taken out and led away by stablemen; the passengers arranged themselves at a table already laid. They had porridge; they had toast and eggs, and cuts of ham; or they had cutlets or chops. There was coffee, poured from a great tin pot, or tea from a brown earthen one. Some of the more hearty travelers had ale, and kidneys, with crusty bread. And they all talked.

At the beginning of the journey they'd been huddled together, inside or out, closely wrapped and silent; but now the day had opened so robustly and with so many promises that they thawed completely and shone with fellowship and good will. They talked of other journeys; of other inns; of other drivers, of other landlords. And there was usually a waiter, a groom, or a porter, somewhere in the past who made an amusing memory.

This road between New York and Philadelphia was written into the history of the Abernathys. Denis, as a

boy, had picked up the story bit by bit. The father of Simon, an almost legendary figure, had come to the Jerseys by way of New York in the day when the colony was an almost absolute wilderness. He'd been a Scot, a hard-bitten, enterprising man, by all accounts, and accustomed to privations. He was a pack-peddler; with a pair of heavy pistols in his belt and a pack on his back, he trudged the paths from settlement to settlement, and from one Indian village to another. He bought goods in one place and sold them in the next.

Simon had followed in his tracks. A youth: tough, strong, sharp-minded, and who permitted nothing to stand in his way. He'd carried a pack himself as a boy; as a young man, he'd owned horses. He was at his full power when the Revolution broke and filled the settlements with plotting and violence. He'd profited by this, and after the war had found himself with firm ground under his feet.

Ann Craufurd, in past days, would sit of an evening with Denis in their little mountain home and she'd tell him of these things.

"Your grandfather," she'd say to him, "was frightened of the sea; but for that and for the pine and spruce woods, he might have been a sailor. But the shadows of things always hemmed him in. Now, Owen, even as a boy, and before he ever saw such a thing, knew what the sun would be like and it lifting itself above a mountain-top. There were many things in his mind his father never thought of; and when he'd mentioned them he'd get a hard word or a frowning look."

But Owen's vision had been deep, Ann Craufurd had said; and—Denis listened to him with attention. And he'd watch the things Owen would do. He saw a hard-working man; strong and resolute, with a brain ever operating within his skull. He'd a spirit that showed in his every act; he'd a desire for progress, for improvement; for new things, and better ones. The boy would listen and watch, but Ann Craufurd had been the medium through which he had the most complete knowledge of his father. For Owen had told her things he'd spoken of with no one else. He'd said man was not to go on laboring over the hills forever, and through waste places, depending upon the power of his thews and the patience of his faithful beasts. There were to be new men, new thoughts, new ways. . . .

All through the day's journey, Denis sat wrapped in his cloak. The road was good; the air was clear, there was a comforting sun. The iron-shod feet of the horses kept up a sturdy rattle and ring on the stones. They were going at a good pace; indeed it was a pace that at one time would have seemed breathless. But Denis knew it was not enough; he felt that the time was ripe for more speed, for a greater bulk of movement. The horseflesh of his grandfather's day would, before many years, be put aside; he could see steam not only on all the rivers and all the roads, but in all the workshops. A new day, and a great day! He was grieved that Owen would not be alive when it dawned. . . .

They reached Burlington some time in the evening; and he supped and slept at the Spar and Anchor, a little tavern quite near the river. In the morning his sack of belongings, together with those of other travelers, was placed on board a sloop at about seven o'clock. When the tide began to ebb they cast off with mainsail and jibs filling with the cool wind. Within an hour the city began to lift on the right-hand bank; the vessel skirted to the west of a long, narrow island, and in a short time they ran into Dock Creek, which curved crookedly into the city's heart.

Denis was now on more or less familiar ground. Here was the Merchants Exchange; here were many stage offices; coaches ran from this point in many directions and to many cities. In Strawberry Street the young man entered at a wide doorway and into a low-ceilinged room which was crowded with men who had their tall hats tilted back on their heads, smoked strong-smelling cigars and talked in loud voices. This was the office of Turner & Vreed, Brokers. At a counter, Denis saw an alert-looking young

man with fiery red hair, who was running down a column of figures with amazing speed. And when the result had been set triumphantly at the foot of the column, Denis spoke to the young man, who greeted him cordially.

"I've been expecting you to pass through the city, and hoped to see you," said the red-haired young man, who was Seth Turner, the head of this very active establishment. "The newspapers had long accounts of what happened at Amboy. A very devil of a thing," he said, his voice full of sympathy. "And the damned ruffian was never caught, was he?"

"Not yet," said Denis. "But we have not put the matter aside: there is still a chance."

"How long will you be here?" asked Turner, as calls for his attention came from every side. "I can't give you but a moment now."

"I'll be at the Black Horse in Second Street," Denis told him. "Come in, and we'll have supper. I have a great many questions to ask you."

"At six or thereabouts," said Turner. "I'll be there."

When Denis left the broker's office he headed north and turned into High Street. At Second he paused; around the angle of the great shed where the farmers and victualers and fish merchants brought their wares for sale, he saw a name upon the front of a building: PURSELL.

Denis crossed to the market building and then, standing in the midst of a chaffering crowd at a farmer's stall, he looked toward the building from which the sign hung. Standing on the broad doorstep was Louis Descoings, and beside him was a short man with a square, tremendously powerful body. Denis spoke to a man who carried a market sack slung across his shoulder, pointing at the short man.

"Could you tell me who that is?" he asked.

"That," said the man with the sack, "is Garvey Pursell. He's just opened that office for his new teaming business. A new man in the city, but he's already got the others in the same line of business doing a lot of thinking."

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE Black Horse was in Second Street within ten minutes' walk of High. Denis Abernathy was greeted in a friendly fashion by the landlord, for this was a tavern where he'd been accustomed to stay at times while in the city. He was given a chamber overlooking the street, and a coal fire was kindled for him in a Franklin stove. And as he was unpacking his gear and stowing it away, the landlord knocked and looked in at him.

"You've not been here this long time," the man said, after making sure the stove was drawing well. "Business doesn't bring you to the city as often as it once did."

"No. I've been making shorter hauls in the past year, coming no further than Lancaster. As I've dropped everything but my own teams, I can't cover the distance to Philadelphia with profit."

The landlord seemed interested in this.

"Your father used to speak of working only with his own wagons, but he never did it because it would shorten his hauls, just as you say. He felt he had to come into the city; the cargoes were here." The landlord smiled and nodded his head. "And where they are, the money is, also."

"That's true," said Denis. Then after a little more talk, he said: "I'll be having Mr. Turner in for supper with me. Maybe you could do some little extra thing for us?"

The round face of the host at once began to shine.

"At this season of the year I always suggest pigeons," he told Denis. "As you may know, it's a specialty at the Black Horse. And they are in great plenty this autumn; fine, large flights of them have come down from the North and they are stopping much longer than they do most times. The wild game men bring them into the market in scores



every day. A dozen nice fat ones, now: perhaps baked in a pie?"

"Very good, if I could be sure of Turner's taste."

"He often has them; I have known him to come here with them specially in mind. Also, he cares for sherry pudding; and I've seen him take a good deal of pleasure over an almond cheesecake."

Denis smiled.

"Very well," he said. "Since you know his likes so well, I'll leave it all to you."

It was some time after dark that Turner reached the tavern; Denis welcomed him in the low-ceilinged bar, where they drank steaming punch. Then into the coffee-room, where they had a snug table and were served with cups of thick lentil soup; then filets of broiled fish. Then the pigeon pie was placed between them.

"As I left your place in Strawberry Street today," said Denis after a space given over to the food, "I happened to see an establishment with the name of Pursell over it. On High Street."

"Oh, yes," said Seth Turner. "Pursell. Quite a person, too. One of the new kind. He goes along, and sweeps up as he goes. And his sweepings now amount to a good deal. Along with that, if all I hear is believable stuff, he's preparing for further activities."

The red-headed young man split a delicately done pigeon in two with a bed of steaming oysters for it, edged with mushrooms and sweetbreads; the flaky crust of the pie he heaped up to be ready at hand when needed.

"Times are changing," he said. "There is a deal more enterprise in business. No one seems satisfied, as they used to be, with a comfortable way of life. Large sums," said Turner, after swallowing the savory mouthful he'd been engaged upon, and which had clouded his voice not

In the morning Denis' sack of belongings was placed

a little, "are the requirement of each day. The methods used for past years are being dropped. I find myself, sometimes, engaged with things in a single hour that would once occupy me for a whole day."

"What do you know of Pursell?" asked Denis.

"I can pull all I know of him together in a few minutes," said Turner. "And that's because I do no business with him—not yet, anyway. He's originally from Connecticut; a wagoner who seemed to have more intelligence than most. He was once employed by Morcau, Descoings & Abernathy; or"—with a smile—"maybe you know that. But he left them some years ago and began to operate for himself. And, as I've said, he's done quite well."

"As I hear it, he has taken over all but the dregs of the trade on the Amboy road," said Denis.

"Well, of course, that would be so, the Descoings firm not seeming to care for that branch of their business any more." Turner saw the look in Denis' face and added: "I see you don't understand why. And the fact is, I've wondered about it a number of times myself."

"I've been thinking of Pursell for the last week," said Denis Abernathy. "He's interesting. Most of the things you've just said about him I've already heard, but there's a few that haven't been mentioned. How did he make a beginning? And how long did it take?"

"I see what you mean," said the red-haired young man. "I think he must have had help." Turner frowned at the pigeon pie, and then looked at Denis again. "Men who make their own way in the teaming business usually take some time for it. Maybe a dozen or so years. But I know Pursell wasn't that long about it. He was a known figure a year after his first wagon rolled down the turnpike. Fixed and substantial. It was, just as you think, too quick-



on a sloop. When the tide began to ebb they cast off.

ly done for his effort alone. Yes, I feel sure," said Turner, "he had help."

"I have asked a few questions," said Denis. "Here and there. And I've listened to people talk; and it all seems to indicate that the rise of Pursell on the Amboy road came about the time the wagoning of Moreau, Descoings & Abernathy began to decline."

Turner paused, with an oyster on its way to his mouth. "This," he said, "is an interesting moment. I begin to see things as they come together." He ate the oyster and the mushrooms, all the time shaking his head in admiration. And then he said: "Moreau, Descoings & Abernathy are on the wrong side of the river for me, and I've had no dealings with them. But I know they've always been close and careful dealers, and it doesn't seem likely they'd willingly let a profitable branch of their business be scuttled by a rival." He selected another oyster. "Your idea is, I think, that it was the firm that put Pursell on his feet and set him going. And you want to know why."

"If they have," said Denis, "I already know why."

Young Turner looked at him inquiringly. Then, as they ate and drank, Denis told him of his experiences in Amboy and New York. Turner's interest grew; and the two brawls with Mule Shapely and the appearance of Louis Descoings at the end of the last of them made him wag his head.

"I know Louis," he said. "And if the fellow you call Mule was sent for to lie in wait for you, it was Louis who did it. Now this horse surgeon, Kipper"—and Seth Turner looked at Denis—"he's a kind of mystery man."

"I made up my mind to that some time ago," said Denis.

"He's rather well known," said Turner. "At least, after a fashion. He goes up and down the roads, sometimes here, sometimes on the other side of the river, with his

team of Spanish mules. A skillful man with hurt horses. All admit that. But they'll admit no more than that, for it is all they know."

"I never saw him before that night in Amboy," said Denis. "And even then he puzzled me. But Mr. Thistlewate tells me he was a sort of confidante of my grandfather; so I suppose he must be all right."

Turner was much interested in what Denis told him of the Moreaus.

"So, the same thing is going on at New Orleans as is going on at Amboy?" said the young broker. "The Descoings took the Moreaus into the business when they needed them, just as they did your grandfather. Then came a time, I suppose, when they felt they had absorbed the values of both, and that was the time when they began to starve them out."

"You think, then—"

"That the Descoings have taken over the trade of the Perth Amboy-Burlington turnpike under the name of Pursell. And, if you ever look into the affairs of the Moreaus, you will, I think, find the same idea operating there."

For a time they ate in silence; then Denis said:

"As I came down the river this morning, I got the idea it would be a good thing to have some talk with you. And I'm glad I did. For your notion of the thing agrees in many ways with what I've been thinking."

THEY finished their pigeon pie, and a sherry pudding that came after it, then sat with small glasses of brandy, and pipes and tobacco before them on the bare table. Turner sipped his brandy and enjoyed its flavor; he charged a pipe and lighted it.

"We've said but very little about your grandfather's death." He looked at Denis through the smoke. "What do you mean to do about it?"

"I've told you what I said to the two Descoings. That immediately after he'd charged them with robbing him, an attempt was made upon his life."

"And you believe that they were concerned in that?" asked Turner.

"It was my grandfather's belief. He said so—not in plain words, but the meaning was unmistakable. I am holding the thought fast in my mind, for in the end, I feel, it will turn out true."

"They talked for some time over the tobacco and brandy; and then Denis mentioned Pursell once more."

"And that reminds me," he said. "Awhile ago you spoke of his locating himself here in High Street: and that seemed to mean to you that he'd newer and bigger things in his mind."

"I recall some talk about that in my office," said Turner. "A week or two ago someone was speaking of Pursell and they said he'd probably broaden out and take more space in the world. Shipping was one of the guesses. But that couldn't be it," said Turner. "He has no experience in that line. It's wagoning." He laughed as he looked at Denis, but there was no mirth in his eyes. "Perhaps he'll be sending teams across the mountains. You'll have another rival."

DENIS ABERNATHY remained two days in Philadelphia. During that time he visited merchants and shipping people whom he knew; there were others whom his father had known; also there were brokers, horse dealers and cargo handlers. He talked with people in large counting-houses, in little cubbyholes of offices, on ship decks, on freight-piled wharves. He was an Abernathy, and what he'd say would likely be things to give attention to.

The spirit of the father was in the son. Denis, as he talked, glowed with the fine, rich dream of Owen. He fashioned thoughts that had hearts of fire; and he framed them in words that compelled attention. He went from place to place and spoke to people as he'd so often wanted to speak; and in each place he dropped a parting phrase: He'd return before long—and then he'd have even more to say.

On the evening before he left, he supped with Turner at the City Tavern; and during the course of the meal, Turner said to him:

"Here I was the other night, stirred with the whole matter of plot and, perhaps, counterplot; with murder and retaliation, with laws and judgments: but the next day, what do I hear? You were going from one person to another, preaching a sort of commercial doctrine. You were busy lighting fires, some of which I'm told are already burning briskly."

"It was the first chance I've had to unburden myself of a thing that's been filling my mind for a long time," said Denis.

"And," said the red-haired young man shrewdly, "there was perhaps a measure of forestalling in it. You were a good deal interested in the possibilities of Pursell's enterprises the other night. I saw it in your looks and your questions. I've often heard"—with a smile—"that back-settlement people have always held that the back country was theirs, and theirs only. And that they never liked interlopers."

Next morning Denis drove out of the inn yard at the Black Horse in a light two-wheeled cart drawn by a big, easy-stepping gray horse. He crossed the Schuylkill River and soon struck into the turnpike. This was firm and well laid, and the gray horse trotted along its level stretch with a space-eating stride. This span of road was one that Denis knew well, though in the last year or so, as he'd told the landlord at the Black Horse Tavern, he'd seen it seldom. A good road for three-score miles; then came the rutted and stony section which led to the gateway of the hills.

The light cart passed great Conestoga wagons traveling in either direction—some of them drawn by oxen, slow-footed, patient beasts, strong and obedient; again, some

were pulled by mule teams. Denis would study the mules with speculation in his eyes. He liked them; they were, in some ways, animals to be desired—cautious, careful creatures, seeming to have instincts and knowledge superior to the horse. But the mule hadn't the sheer power the horse was capable of throwing against its collar, and the steep grades of the West often sapped its courage. After all was said, nothing quite equaled the deep-chested splendor of the horse. Some of the fine beasts the young man saw along the way made his eyes sparkle; he had the comforting thought that creatures such as these had been created to be man's helper in the difficult ways of all new countries.

As Denis drove along, he picked out the characteristics of the teams he passed. Here was one that was distinctly Flemish. The stiff crest between the ears, the curve of the thick neck, the splendid ease of its short movements. Another was Dutch. Grand beasts—stolid, meek, but willing to give of what they had; and what they had was a great deal. And here was an English team, or at least, one that had outstanding English qualities: rugged animals, bred by the islanders for the heavy loads and short distances of their native place.

But most of the horses were what were known as Morgans. A sort of American mixture—in them you saw traces of many breeds, and this mixture was known by many local names. The lighter variety of Morgan gave better service on this well-laid section of the road. It was the coach-horse type; it had both strength and speed, and on the level roads both of these could be brought into play. But when the foothills were reached, the shrewd wagoner changed his teams. Here the giants would enter—slow, placid, strong, never-failing. . . .

At the old Warren Tavern, on the slope of the Chester Valley, Denis drew up. A hostler took charge of the gray, and the young man went inside. This tavern had stood there before and after Revolutionary times and when the pike was known as King's Road. It was a hearty, old-fashioned place, with scrubbed and sanded floors, oaken tables and a huge sideboard covered with delft, pewter and wooden ware. A round-bellied little man greeted Denis.

"Mr. Abernathy," he said, his hand out-held. "It is such a long time I've not seen you."

"Almost a year, Wilhelm!"—shaking hands.

"But it was last night when I heard your name," said the host. "There were people here, and they spoke of you."

"Wagon people?" asked Denis.

"No; strangers. Though," said the landlord, "I have seen them here before."

Denis turned and shook hands with the plump, rosy mistress of the inn, and her equally plump and rosy daughter. Then he went to a pump-room at one side, brushed his clothes and washed away the grime of the journey. During his absence they laid a white cloth upon a table. And while he ate, he talked with them.

"Changes will be on the road," said the host. "Last night these people who were here asked prices on horses. And I heard this morning that they also talked of wagons."

Denis looked at the round little man with interest.

"I think you said they mentioned my name?"

"They were talking about teams, and your name was spoken. As I said"—and the landlord wrinkled his brows thoughtfully—"once before they were here—a year ago, or maybe not so long."

The daughter of the tavernkeeper was more positive.

"You were here that other time," she said to Denis. "And there was one of the men you did not like."

"It was the loud-talking one!" said Wilhelm. "I remember now."

"Our Frederick was serving them with white wine," the girl said to Denis. "He is a clumsy boy and spilled some of it. And the man got up to strike him. You spoke to him, and also got up."

The scene came back to Denis. He recalled the strident voice, the bullying manner, the hard eyes. It was Louis

Descoings! The next time he'd seen that young man had been on the afternoon he'd gone to visit his grandfather at the countinghouse of Moreau, Descoings & Abernathy. And as he saw him striding up and down, slashing at his boots with his whip, he'd dimly remembered him.

"Were these people traveling westward?" Denis asked.

"Yes," said the innkeeper. "How far, I don't know; but I heard one of them say they'd be in Lancaster by night."

Denis had his horse harnessed an hour later. Bidding the inn people good-by, he set out once more along the turnpike. What he'd heard interested him. Louis Descoings was traveling the western road! He was pricing horses! And wagons! This seemed to agree with what Seth Turner had said. There was a new enterprise afoot!

It was some hours after nightfall that Denis drew up at the States Arms Tavern, a comfortable place for the accommodation of travelers. The young man saw his horse cared for, and after he'd freshened himself up a bit, he ordered his supper. Then he went to the stable to make sure that his orders about the horse were being carried out. There was no one on the road more careful of a faithful animal than Denis Abernathy, and he knew from experience how frequently stablemen at taverns neglected them. In the light of a lantern just inside the door he caught a glimpse of a tall beaver hat, cocked at one side, a long-tailed coat and a pair of half-boots. And at once he recognized Kipper, the horse surgeon.

"I've been expecting to see you," Kipper said.

"You knew I was here?"

Kipper grinned. "When I come a-visiting at a tavern. I always step in for a look at the horses. The gray seemed like an able beast, and I asked about it. The groom mentioned your name."

Denis said nothing to this, and the man went on:

"I must have been a half-day ahead of you. But things are always happening on the road." He paused for a moment. "And then," he added, "I dropped back."

"An accident?" asked Denis.

"No." Kipper shook his head. "I seldom have those."

He was silent. Denis recalled the man's indirect way of communication when he had anything to tell, and he waited for what might follow.

"If you stopped at the Warren Tavern today," said Kipper, at length, "you may have heard that Louis Descoings and Pursell were on ahead of you."

"I was told about Louis. But not about Pursell."

Kipper nodded. "He's not so well known along the turnpike—but he aims to be," said the man. "I heard they were at the Warren last night; so I drove by and stopped at the General Wayne."

Denis knew this tavern to be a wagon-stand, and that its patrons were the rough, hard-drinking teamsters of the western road. That Kipper had passed a comfortable inn to rest at one where the food and accommodations were poor had seemed to indicate something.

The young man looked at the gray horse as it stood in its stall. It had been curried and brushed; there was plenty of straw for its bed, and the horse seemed quite content. Then Denis moved outside, and Kipper followed him.

"Louis had an early start this morning," Kipper told Denis. "But he'd passed the General Wayne a full hour before I had my team harnessed; I like the comforts of a tavern fire in the chill of the morning."

THE night before, so it seemed, the man had avoided the Warren Tavern because these people were there; this morning he'd followed in their wake, but at a distance that would prevent his being seen. Somewhere, perhaps in the middle of the day, he'd stopped. But why?

When the horse surgeon took up his talk once more, he'd drifted to another subject.

"I understand," he said, "that the New Orleans people have left New York."

"Yes," said Denis.

"In a springed carriage, with four horses and a black coachman," said Kipper admiringly. "Very much like quality. I knew," he added, "they'd not keep in the neighborhood of the Descoings long, for they'd soon find out what a poor chance they had of doing anything. They say the girl is spirited." He nodded his head and seemed to approve of this. "But in what way would spirit serve her with old Henri Descoings? Or with Louis? They'd break her down, as they've broken much stronger people. I'm glad she's gone away."

"It's just as well," said Denis.

"Do you know they traveled this way only twenty-four hours ago?"

"I knew they were heading west, but I thought they'd be farther along."

"They stopped at this place last night," said Kipper, "and got an early start this morning."

"Their time will be slower, even with four horses, after they leave Lancaster," Denis said. "The road beyond that grows worse the farther you go. And there is likely to be snow in the hills."

KIPPER lighted a cheroot and smoked it; he put his hands under his coat-tails and nodded. He repeated that he'd felt sure the girl wouldn't stay in New York very long. At first, he acknowledged, he'd thought she would. But at that time she'd been impressed by Henri Descoings' talk: she'd believed many of Louis' accusations; she'd listened to the Sigourneys. But she was intelligent. The longer she looked at the picture they held before her, the less likely it seemed. And then came the death of old Simon! Also the realization, probably fostered by Thistlewate, that the Abernathy interests in the business were failing in much the same ratio as that of the Moreaus—and through the same cause.

"Also, you talked to her," said Kipper to Denis. "You persuaded her. And, news having come that her father had arrived at Pittsburgh, she made up her mind to go to him at once! She made up her mind to tell him all she'd seen and heard and thought—that very likely there had been robbery; that actually, murder had been done!"

Denis listened to this attentively, and with a good deal of surprise. The man was very well informed; it seemed that little had escaped him. How he had acquired all these points of information the young man could not imagine.

And now, once more, Kipper seemed to drift away from his subject. He spoke of roads, of the dangers often to be met on them—especially on roads as lonely as this one was, where there'd be miles of it in which you'd not meet anyone; you'd see nothing but the forests and the hills. There were sudden perils in such places; dark things often menaced the traveler.

Here Kipper shook the ash from his cheroot, and his talk slipped from the road to the person who might be riding, or driving, or trudging its length. If that person carried money, or goods of value, his hazard was especially great.

"I've heard it said," Kipper told Denis, "that any person carrying bad news is feared and hated. And," he said, nodding at the young man, "I can't keep it out of my mind that this girl from New Orleans is bearing a good deal of that very thing on her way west. And," he added, "there are some who wouldn't be pleased at the nature of that news."

Denis fixed the man with a steady look. Kipper filled the air with the flavor of his tobacco roll as he proceeded.

"It's odd how we get thinking of things: About an hour ago, when I went back a piece along the road to see about my mules, it began to run through my mind how we'd all been strung along the highway during the day. First there had been Miss Moreau and young Monselet, then there was Louis Descoings and Pursell; then myself; and afterward you. I didn't know you were behind me, and you didn't know I was ahead of you. But I wonder," said Kipper, "if it was that way with the others?"

These words were quietly spoken, but they held something that made Denis draw in his breath suddenly.

But Kipper, when he resumed, had again shifted. He had dropped the travelers, and once again occupied himself with the road merely—its dangers, its loneliness. Until one reached Lancaster, the highway was hard. But as Denis had said, farther on it was bad. On toward the mountain ranges, things were likely to be different. One could not feel so safe.

"Even on this stretch of it I'm never too sure," the man said. "I always go armed. And," he said, "I'd advise everyone to do the same."

"You seem to have been aroused by something," said Denis. "What has gone wrong?"

But Kipper shook his head as he stood in the shadows. "At times I have a feeling about things," he said. "I seem to sense them as some people sense the coming of bad weather. During the whole of this afternoon and during

what has passed of the evening, the kind of thing has been in my mind that I've often felt in advance of a happening."

Denis smiled. "I wouldn't have thought you superstitious," he said.

"I'm not. But when a man has had many experiences of a given kind, he begins, somehow, to know the atmosphere they happen in."

The young man asked no question; he felt they would have no result. Kipper evidently had something on his mind; but as Denis had noticed on more than one occasion, he never said more than he felt he must.

"You are a wagoner," said Kipper. "And all wagoners carry pistols. If you have one, keep it handy while on this journey. Trust no one you're not sure of." There was a silence; and the man added: "It might be best to do more than that tonight. Don't be too sure of anyone."

Another installment of this fine novel will appear in our forthcoming December issue.

A NEW TYPE OF CROSSWORD PUZZLE

Edited by
Albert H. Morehead

In this crossword puzzle you encounter a challenge to the imagination rather than a strain on the vocabulary. That is

to say, the difficulty is not in the words themselves, but in the definitions. The main types used are the anagram, the enig-

ma, the hidden word and—for variety and to keep you guessing—some straight dictionary definitions. (Solution on page 111.)

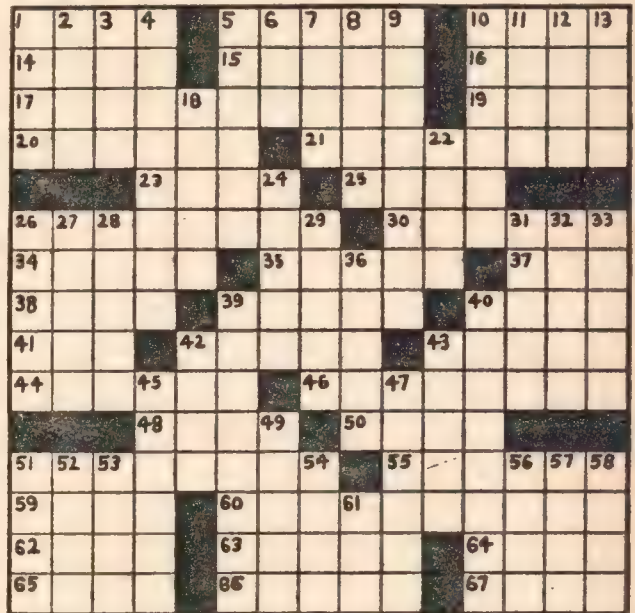
ACROSS

- 1 These include rams
- 5 Though obscured, a beam gets into the cell
- 10 Go gently, return a beast
- 14 Now one can argue with Mr. Moto
- 15 Unintentional knurls are too much for seed cases
- 16 You can beat fifty with a tree
- 17 Eating anything will give us our vim soon
- 19 A tail of a King in the Volunga Saga
- 20 Red Sea turned around and dried up (Ex. xiv. 21)
- 21 Get a view of those paths, son
- 23 Old recorder recorded ten "world-shaking" days
- 25 "If the rest of my fortunes turn — with me." *Hamlet*
- 26 A dog said, "I am doomed"
- 30 High in battle, but announced less so
- 34 When men gets rough they are often licked
- 35 Sirs hereditarily
- 37 Intimate the peak has moved
- 38 Best go back to the spot
- 39 Vespasian's son, or Andronicus
- 40 Young caller acquires age at last
- 41 Before you hear a melody
- 42 Quotes in addition would have spurs on
- 43 Black sheep cry revolutionary when exposed
- 44 Rested from his attempt to run out
- 46 The waves (of oratory) are breasted
- 48 Apparent in the fact that I'm a man
- 50 Ribbon in the front of Russian Alex

- 51 A music-maker is a mob toner
- 55 Jacket for a doped fag
- 59 Hide the cable for Operator X
- 60 To say so little indicates the words are stunted
- 62 Fifty would complete the table, or at least help
- 63 Smooth, but a softer start would make a soldier
- 64 This mixed French black is very hard
- 65 Nibs, bibs, bins, pins,
- 66 An ell less would bring back the name of a fiddler
- 67 The abbreviation implied when % is used

DOWN

- 1 Hidden: a Mosaic prophet
- 2 More unsettled than able to impose a Pax
- 3 Madam (La Gioconda)
- 4 Begin to stir, then the spur returns for the cups
- 5 The solution of homes may be soda mixed
- 6 Strong drink comes back in Austrian river
- 7 Love sends a rose, spiritually arranged
- 8 Nothing leaves Burton confused with a burden
- 9 Fool sailors in storms
- 10 He could bring brilliant outbursts from bottles
- 11 Call a halt to the strip
- 12 Anita, famous for blondes, is lost in a city
- 13 Jot down the start of one Good and Gray
- 18 It seems the verse vacillates
- 22 They don't sound poetic, but they teach
- 24 Can't edit be a charge?
- 26 Cadet behaved peculiarly
- 27 Find a job for each or evil will befall



- 28 You can get mantles in any sort of space
- 29 Marked time as the preacher put food in his middle
- 31 Lean frame
- 32 Keen but hesitant murmur about age
- 33 Conveyances conducted amid sibilants
- 36 Concealments have their uses here
- 39 O it's mute, yet a singer
- 40 Pitch tea (in Boston?), arousing feelings
- 42 Goes backward, of course, but can't quite bark
- 43 The red horse says: stations
- 45 Solomon advised sluggards to look to them
- 47 It's fruitless to be about in the barn
- 49 Bluebeard's sister-in-law starts to revoke
- 51 A clever trick to return part of the rock
- 52 Costume of a transplanted Dutchman
- 53 Card-playing opponent is too muddled to make the first bid
- 54 This is made back in Holland
- 56 Payment to go far and then some
- 57 Collar gives boys a certain tone
- 58 Let us hide our enthusiasm
- 61 Heroine of a Tom Show

LONELINESS at times is an unmerciful tyrant. Trying to prove up on a homestead showed me that. I had chosen an isolated section of New Mexico land, twenty miles from the little Spanish-speaking village of San Marcos. Once a month I rode into town for grub, and one day the friendly old storekeeper asked me if I wanted a dog.

"A dog?" I repeated. "Why do—" Old Pedro explained: "This dog I tell you about, he is very smart, señor. The boys, they learn him as a puppy to hang with his teeth to the rope, when they ring the bell for church. And pretty soon Pancho grows big enough to do it by himself. Pancho learns everything, señor. The next thing he learns how to ring the fire-bell—the bell in the plaza. But ever' time Pancho hear the shouts and see the men running—whenever he hear somebody yell 'fire'—the dog, he runs quick and jumps on the bell-rope! He is jus' like a fireman. He thinks it lots of fun to ring the fire-bell."

Again the old man shook his head sadly. "Ver' much I like the dog, señor. But—well, sometimes late at night the young fellows here, they play the big joke on Pancho. They yell 'fire!' late at night. It is jus' for fun. But Pancho runs real quick to ring the bell. . . . Sure—he thinks a house is on fire! So he rings the bell and wakes everybody out of bed. The men they get up to go to the fire. They find it is only the joke—and they get mad at Pancho. They say they will shoot my dog. That makes me ask if you will have him. I want that Pancho he have a good home—and a kind master!"

That's how I happened to take Pancho back to the ranch with me. He was a splendid dog, a big playful fellow. And he knew how to be friendly without fawning. . . .

Some months after Pancho's arrival I started to dig a well. With the help of Carlos, a distant neighbor, I was down about thirty feet when we struck hard sandstone capping. There was nothing to do but blast through it, for we were pretty certain to hit water under the caprock. When we could dig no farther, both of us were eager to fire charges of dynamite to break through to the precious water beneath.

The evening we drilled holes in readiness for blasting, Carlos reluctantly told me that he might have to go to town the next day. He promised to send his little son over with a note, in case he did go.

Next morning I didn't even wait to see whether Carlos would come. Instead, I slid down the windlass rope and prepared the shots. Using sufficient powder and safety fuse, I touched a lighted match to the fuse-ends, then climbed the rope to the sur-

Pancho Rings the Bell

A homesteader owes his
life to a dog's cleverness.

by B. W. KENNEY

face. A rumbling roar shook the ground. I pattered around, waiting for the smoke and fumes to clear; then I slid back down to see what the explosion had done. A whoop of joy—we had struck water! Already it was oozing up from the broken rock, flooding the bottom of the well.

Hastily I scooped pieces of rock and loosened earth into the big bucket and hauled it to the surface. Then, leaving the bucket on top to make more room below, I went down again for another look. Water was up to my ankles, trickling in quite freely. I pried additional rock loose with the large crowbar, trying to encourage the flow. Some minutes later I looked up, attracted by a slight wheeze of the windlass. I saw the windlass rope rapidly mounting upward. *Somebody was winding it from above!*

"Hey, Carlos!" I shouted. "Is that you? Come on down. We've hit it. Water is pouring in!"

The deep shaft made my voice boom with an unearthly echo. And even as I yelled, the rope suddenly stopped moving. The hooked rope-end dangled a few feet below the top of the well, some twenty feet above my head! Again I yelled, thinking Carlos was playing a joke. No answer.

It dawned upon me then what had happened. Carlos had probably sent his little boy over with a message. I remembered that he had always warned the child away from the deep hole. And now, seeing no one around to forbid, the little chap couldn't resist winding up the windlass rope as he had so often seen his father do.

BLUE BOOK is glad to receive and to print true stories of real experience, running from one thousand to four thousand words each. For each of those accepted each month we will pay, according to our appraisal of its length and strength, an average price of \$50. Manuscripts should be addressed to the Real Experience Editor, the Blue Book Magazine, 230 Park Ave., New York.

My booming yells coming up from below must have frightened the lad and sent him scampering.

At any rate, as I gazed up at the dangling rope, I knew I was trapped! Carlos had gone to San Marcos, and the possibility of anybody else coming along was very remote.

Already the water was up to my knees and rising steadily. What if it were to rise over my head?

Slowly I began to regain my wits, and I tried to speculate upon chances of escape. Scaling the smooth side wall was impossible; the diameter of the hole precluded any chance of a straddle-climb.

Luckily, the long crowbar was still below. With it I punched a hole into the wall above my head, then on the opposite side another. One hole was sunk deep enough to give clearance so that the bar could be slipped back into position, spanning the well somewhat like a chicken-roost. I climbed to my perch with a comforting sense of security.

Thus I sat there, somewhat cramped, thinking and planning. The hours dragged; occasionally I dozed; and with the coming of darkness I lost all sense of time. I awoke from a cat-nap feeling cramped and chilled from having my feet dangling in the water. It had risen steadily and now stood less than a foot below my perch. Impulsively I decided to stand up for a while. I rose cautiously.

STANDING there, almost afraid to move, I was surprised beyond measure to hear Pancho suddenly whining above. So far, I had given the dog no thought, but evidently he had been lying at the edge of the well. My movement on the bar attracted his attention. He was standing now, his head and shoulders dimly outlined against the starlight.

While talking to him, I must have shifted my weight. The first thing I knew, I was plunging down with the empty-stomach feeling one has in a fast-dropping elevator. My feet struck bottom with a jolt; in water up to my chin. Indeed I had to keep my head thrown back, else my mouth would have been submerged.

The shock left me breathless. I churned and threshed about for a moment, probably the instinctive movements of a swimmer suddenly thrown overboard. Pancho started barking in response to my yells. Then, the first shock passed, I attempted to move the perch to another place. Crumbly earth, however, had absorbed too much water; it was like trying to drill in loose sand. A new support was out of the picture.

All the while I could tell that the water was still slowly rising! Chilled, once more thoroughly frightened, I decided it would soon rise over my

head! The very thought began to play upon my imagination. A curtain seemed to drop in front of my mind.

A long piercing wail from Pancho brought me back to my senses. I fumed at myself for being such a fool, turning my attention to the dog's antics above me. He would give a short bark and run away from the well, only to return and repeat the performance. He was urging me in his own way to come on up from the well.

Watching him, speculating on his behavior, I continued to see his head appear over the edge of the well each time he returned to bark at me. Up there, too, I suddenly saw the dangling windlass rope! It had been there all the time, of course, but *now* the rope and Pancho came into mental focus as my mind seized upon a final desperate plan. Whoopee!

The plan snagged immediately. I couldn't think of the Spanish word for "Fire."

"Fire! Pancho—fire!"

I yelled in English, but the words only stirred the dog to a state of uncertainty. He whined softly, hanging over the edge in a seeming desperate effort to understand.

"Hey, Pancho—the rope! Fire! Fire!"

It was maddening to think that my life depended upon a simple Spanish word! Then from nowhere it popped into my consciousness—*quemazon*, Spanish for fire. With it came the word *campana*—bell—and other Spanish words that had been hanging on my tongue.

"Pancho! *Perro mio! Oiga—pronto!*"

The intelligent fellow immediately stopped to listen, his head cocked.

"*La campana, Pancho. Pronto—pronto. Quemazon—quemazon!*"

For an instant he stood undecided. Again I shouted, this time churning the water with my hands to add to the excitement—

"*Fuego! La campana, Pancho—Quemazon!*"

This time there was no hesitation. For a brief second he stood at the brink; then I saw a shaggy body leap forward across the yawning mouth of the well—I heard the sharp click of teeth—the sudden whir of the windlass rope. Down he came—*splash!*—whimpering joyously and licking my face as he swam beside me.

Almost numb from the chill water, weak from excitement, I painfully climbed the rope to the surface. With a half-hitch to make it hang sidewise, I lowered the big bucket to the dog. Wise old fellow, he immediately scrambled into it.

Cranking the windlass to draw him up was the greatest pleasure I could ever expect to experience. Then and there—were I to have had my choice of the dog or that bucket filled with gold—my decision would have been for Pancho.

Memoirs of a

by ANDRÉ

Escape from France; refuge in England; life in America.

WHEN in 1930 I received a letter from President Hibben of Princeton announcing the endowment of a new chair in French to be called the Meredith Howland Pyne chair, in memory of a Princeton student killed in the war, and asking me if I would be the first incumbent, I accepted with joy. In my youth it had been my ambition to teach; in maturity, I was to have the opportunity.

My wife and I have retained the most tender memories of that semester spent at Princeton. We found a full and tranquil happiness there. I was engaged in the calling of professor which, together with that of writer, was that for which I had been born.

At the end of the semester President Hibben said to me:

"Your course has been a success; your students have made notable progress; would you like to stay with us and occupy this chair permanently? You would have to spend eight months of the year in the United States but you would have four months of vacation in France."

I was sorely tempted, asked for time to discuss it with my wife and we hesitated a long while. We liked Princeton; we had been happy there; the life of a professor delighted me. Moreover, we realized that the Old World was heading toward shipwreck, and that it would be wise to provide a refuge for ourselves elsewhere. But to accept meant to leave France, to lose touch with our friends, to bring up our children in a foreign land. We believed we had no right to make that decision. I refused.

This long stay in Princeton helped me to understand America better than my earlier trip had done. When I returned I wrote an article in which I said that I had encountered everywhere three phantoms: the Puritan, the Pioneer and the Feudal Lord. It was an accurate description. Even today my three specters continue to haunt many sections of America. But I had then, and still have, confidence in the future of the United States,

because I find here more numerous elements of social understanding than in any other country. . . .

I returned from the United States certain that there was a duty to be discharged by a French writer who could speak English—which was to maintain, on every opportunity offered, a spiritual bond between France and America. . . . During the war, when I talked to the French about the English, and to the English about the French, I found sympathetic auditors because their interests were identical. After the war these interests diverged.

France had asked for guaranties of security, and not receiving them, had carried on alone the policy of the Ruhr and that of Eastern alliances. England, frightened by old Napoleonic memories and disturbed by American public opinion, had thereupon fallen back on an outmoded doctrine, that of the balance of power. Through fear of too strong a France, she had favored the rearmament of Germany. I had done my best to point out, in articles in the English newspapers and in lectures, the danger of a rupture and even of a permanent disagreement between the two powers interested in maintaining the peace of Europe. But I had found in each of the two countries a profound distrust of the other. . . .

While Tardieu was premier, I accidentally witnessed a tragic scene: the assassination of President Paul Doumer by the mad Russian Gorguloff. Every year a charity bazaar was held in Paris for the benefit of the widows and children of writers killed during the war. Many authors used to go there, assisted by pretty actresses, to autograph their books, and each year the President of the Republic would honor the gathering by a visit. In 1932 I was there as usual seated behind a table covered with my books; I was just signing "Atmosphere" for an old lady when I heard a prolonged uproar. The Chief of State entered. There was the sound of faint reports, to which I paid no heed. But running feet, cries, and a sudden silence attracted my attention. I lifted my head—and saw the President lying on the ground surrounded by kneeling men.

Difficult Life

MAUROIS

"What is happening?"

I left my table to go for news. Claude Farrere, who was then president of our Society and a brave naval officer, had thrown himself in front of Monsieur Doumer, and had received a bullet in his arm. A doctor who had been leaning over the body got up, saying:

"Messieurs, take off your hats. . . . The President is dead."

He was obviously mistaken, for just then the wounded man opened his eyes and moved his lips. The doors of the hall were thrown open. It was Tardieu, wearing a coat with a fur collar and a high hat. I shall never forget the expression of despair and rage on his face.

"But who did it?" he demanded. . . . "Why?"

Only then did I think of the assassin, and saw a big fellow with the appearance of a stupid brute surrounded by policemen. Someone touched me on the shoulder. It was the old lady.

"Well, monsieur?" she said. "What about my inscription?"

ABOUT the twentieth of August [1939] the political news became worse. Worried, we decided to return to Paris. Already troop transports were crawling along the railroads beside which we drove.

Although for a number of years I had not been of military age, I had made application to remain an officer in the reserves. And so, on the second of September, I presented myself at the Place de Paris, where I was informed that I had been attached, by the Ministry of War, to a Committee on Information of which Jean Giraudoux was to be the head.

Rarely in the course of my life have I felt such discouragement and sadness as in the few days I spent at the General Commissariat of Information. . . . This organization, like the others, was torn by political passions. For me, who hated quarrels, these discussions rapidly became so intolerable that I begged General Chardigny, who was in charge of the Army contingent at the Commissariat of Information, to send me somewhere else.

Unexpectedly, just at the moment when I had given up hope, I received

one morning a letter bearing the imprint of the British War Office.

Sir,

I am commanded by the Army Council to convey to you a most cordial invitation to act as French Official Eyewitness at General Headquarters of the British Field Force, which has now arrived in France.

I am to inform you that, in the event of your accepting this invitation, our Military Attaché in Paris, Lieutenant-Colonel the Hon. W. Fraser, has been instructed to make all the necessary arrangements for your reception with the Commander-in-Chief. . . .

It is easy to understand that this letter gave me great pleasure. Not only did I appreciate its warmth and its friendly tone, but I saw in it my salvation and the possibility of following the war despite my age. I rushed to show it to General Chardigny and to André Morize, who both advised me to accept. I called upon Colonel Fraser, the English Military Attaché, and he told me that the British General Headquarters was located at Arras, that I was expected there, and I should ask for Colonel Reynolds.

The Official Eyewitness—such was my title. The duties seemed ill-defined. Colonel Reynolds, to whom the Embassy had sent me, was in charge of Public Relations and had his headquarters at a hotel in Arras; his duties included the press, censorship, cinema and radio. He was an agreeable but absent-minded Englishman. In his world I was a new and disturbing species—the Official Eyewitness. . . .

"Witness of what?" he asked me, laughing. "Nothing ever happens."

I paid a visit to General Gort, who received me in the Chateau d'Habarcq; he assigned me a car for transportation and an officer to accompany me. It happened that this officer, Captain Grant, was an old friend from peace time, and had been the English publisher of my little "Voltaire."

I found Franco-British relations in this war very different from what they had been in 1914. So far as the work of the general staffs was concerned, understanding on the whole was better. But among the people distrust

and sometimes even hostility were constantly inflamed by German propaganda, which was insistent, insinuating, sarcastic, tenacious and ingenious, and by the old grudges of the French.

"England will fight to the last Frenchman!" the Stuttgart radio announced.

General Brownrigg, Adjutant General of the British Army, an excellent and very shrewd man, was sincerely distressed by these difficulties. He asked me to draw up the Ten Commandments of the British Soldier in France, had an enormous number of copies printed and distributed to the troops. So this of all my works is the one that has had the largest printing. It began:

I. Remember that in the eyes of the French who are watching you, you represent England. It is by your appearance, your conduct and your discipline that they will judge our country. . . .

Today I cannot read that text without anguish of heart.

IN December of 1939 I visited the Maginot Line.

"I wish each British brigade," General Gort said to me, "to spend several weeks in Lorraine to get actual war experience."

And so I went to see the Scotsmen in front of Metz. . . . I saw fine soldiers who inspired confidence. The armament of the forts, the perfection of the firing plans, the multiple observation posts, the large guns that flanked the anti-tank ditches, everything in Lorraine seemed as formidable as the line in Flanders seemed the reverse.

"On this side at least," I said to my guide, "they shall not pass."

But I did not stop to consider that if they broke through elsewhere, all this force would become useless and this magnificent army would be imprisoned. . . .

As soon as I had returned to Arras, I was called upon by Captain Georges de Castellane who belonged to the General Staff of the First Army Group and who came on behalf of General Billotte to ask me to give lectures to all the armies of the group.

"I'm going to send you around among my armies," he said. "Talk to them about the British Army and also about England in general. . . . I myself know the English well; they are slow, terribly slow, but in the end they get things done. And then they hold on. That's what you must explain to the French."

Then began for me several strange and exciting weeks. Each morning a French military car would come to get me and take me to a new staff headquarters. I would have lunch with the general, and in the evening my

lecture would be delivered before a gathering of two thousand officers, noncoms and soldiers. Thus I saw a large number of our leaders.

In April I went on with my tour. I saw the brilliant General Fagalde, crackling with energy, and, with the Seventh Army, the one holding the left flank along the sea, General Giraud, who made a great impression on me. In physical aspect, in strength of character and in moral worth he seemed a leader after my own heart, a leader for the heroes of Kipling. He was bitter about the inadequacy of our preparations.

"We shall not be ready before 1941," he said. "Do you know how many airplanes I have at my disposal, I, the commander of the Army? Eight! And how many flying officers for these eight planes? Thirty! There's our aviation."

Despite this terrifying insufficiency of matériel, I took courage again when I saw men like General Giraud and Admiral Abrial, with whom I spent two days at Dunkerque. "No country," I said to myself, "can produce better leaders." It was true, but what can the greatest soldier do if he is completely crippled by total lack of armament? The weakness of France and England in 1940 was not due to the qualities of the armies but to the imprudence of those who had pursued social reforms, prosperity, riches, partisan victories, at a time when security, that is the life itself of the country, was at stake. . . .

I was to spend the end of my leave in Perigord, and it had been agreed that we should start by car on the tenth of May. That morning before setting out I turned on the radio to listen to the news. I heard:

"Monsieur Frossard, Minister of Information, is about to speak to you—"

It was a bad sign; at that time our Ministers never spoke to us except to announce catastrophes or to ask for money.

"Last night," Frossard said, "the Germans invaded Belgium, Luxembourg and the Low Countries. . . . All officers on leave must rejoin their units immediately."

It was the great offensive, predicted long ago by General MacFarlane. I had to return at once to Arras. Simone came with me to the Gare du Nord. There were so many officers on the platform that the trains had to be first doubled, then tripled. My comrades seemed gay and confident.

"At last," they said, "we shall have a chance to win this war."

On that morning in a train full of military men I did not hear a single pessimistic comment. . . .

Captain Grant was waiting for me on the station platform in Arras. "We are leaving for Belgium," he told me.

It was exciting to cross the Belgian frontier, which we had looked at for so long from a distance. All along the route the British Army advanced in admirable order. The trucks were camouflaged with branches. Women and children along the road held out flowers to the soldiers. At the entrance to Brussels the columns moved off obliquely and swung around the city. Our car went straight in. To our great surprise when we stopped in front of the Hotel Metropole, we were surrounded by an immense crowd which cried: "Long live France! . . . Long live England!"

That evening our orders were to return to Lille. I spent part of the night there in the high tower of the *Echo du Nord*, with Audra, Dean of the Faculty of Letters, and his wife, watching the bombardment of the suburbs. The German airplanes seemed to be everywhere, and high flames encircled the city.

Next day we returned to Belgium. Everything was changed. No more offerings of flowers, no more cheers. Women and old men on their doorsteps were looking in dread toward the sky.

"But what's the matter with them?" Lefevre asked. "They look as though they had been *struck*."

They had in fact been *struck*. All along the road we found traces of German bombs. . . .

Very soon we saw the first refugees. I have described elsewhere these successive zones, in which one encountered first the automobiles of the rich driven by impeccable chauffeurs; then the cars of the poor stuffed with provisions and made ungainly by mattresses tied over the roofs; then the villagers on bicycles, with the curé at their head; then the sad procession of those afoot, followed by a few barefooted loafers. A whole country was in exodus, and this human wave, when it reached a village or city, swept its population along with it.

Two more days passed, then I noticed grim faces among the Englishmen around me. I heard murmurs, reluctant phrases, and finally I learned of the rupture of the French front at Sedan. After that our life followed a disordered and unintelligible course.

IN the north unverifiable rumors circulated: "The Germans are in Cambrai!" And the French Mission decided to withdraw, taking me with it. Then it was learned that the news was false and we returned to Arras. "The Germans are at Bapaume!" And Colonel Medlicott, who was now Chief of Public Relations, said to us: "Reassemble at Amiens."

On the twentieth of May we found the city of Amiens overrun by refugees and stripped of its substance like a field ravaged by grasshoppers.

No beds available. I rolled myself in a blanket. In the night Colonel Medlicott had me awakened:

"We are leaving for Boulogne," I was told by an English officer he had sent, "but two of our cars have been destroyed; we no longer have room for you or the correspondents. The Germans are coming. Return to Paris."

We hurried to the station. It was packed with refugees. An intelligent and kindly military commissioner understood our situation:

"There's only one way I can get you away from here," he said. "There is a baggage-car full of gold I am sending to Paris. You can get in it. Will that do?"

"Yes indeed!"

It was a nightmare trip. German airplanes followed us and tried to destroy the tracks; we had nothing to eat. The engine proceeded at a walking pace, and at each grade-crossing we found again the sad tide of refugees which spread out over the tracks and kept us motionless for hours.

Finally after an interminable journey we arrived in Paris. We were surprised to find the city little changed. The shock of defeat had been so sudden and so violent that France, stunned into semi-consciousness by the blow, had not yet understood what had happened to her. My wife cried out when she saw me enter. Having had no news from me since the sixteenth of May she thought I was missing, a prisoner. On the twenty-eighth of May in a café I heard over the radio:

"Monsieur Paul Reynaud, Premier of France, is about to speak to you—"

"Here we go," said the man next to me, "another catastrophe!"

And, in fact, Reynaud sorrowfully announced the capitulation of the Belgian Army. I thought: "It's the end."

I went to report to Colonel Schiffer, and found him with Captain Max Hermant of Weygand's General Staff.

"Why don't you go to London," the latter said to me, "and explain our situation to the English people?"

"I am under the orders of General Headquarters. I have already promised at the request of our Ambassador to give a talk in London on the twenty-fifth of June; all that's necessary is to send me a little sooner."

"I will talk to Vincennes about it," he said. . . .

On the third of June, Paris was bombed by three hundred German airplanes. Despite the large number of dead and wounded this raid made little impression. On the fifth of June the second German offensive began against our new lines along the Somme and the Aisne.

On Sunday the ninth Colonel Schiffer told me that Captain Her-

mant had telephoned from General Headquarters that I was to leave immediately for London. He gave me an order, with which I was to secure a place in an English military plane. I went to see the British Air Attaché, and he said to me:

"Be at the Buc Airdrome tomorrow at noon."

Would it still be possible at noon on the tenth of June to get to Buc? I began to doubt it. Already it was said that German motorized divisions had reached Vernon, Nantes. Tanks had been seen at Isle-Adam. That was in the suburbs of Paris.

From the balcony of the apartment in Neuilly, which we had loved so much, we looked for a last time together at the trees of the Bois de Boulogne, the Arc de Triomphe and the Mont Valérien crowned with its Italian cypresses. Then we embraced. We did not know whether we should ever see each other again.

To my great surprise, I reached the Buc Airdrome without difficulty. The myriads of cars that were leaving Paris that day were heading toward the south, not toward the west. At the entrance to the field a sergeant of the military police verified my identity.

"The Germans are within thirty kilometers, *mon Capitaine*," he said.

That wasn't far, but he was calm, he was performing his duty to the last moment. The airplane which was to take me had not yet arrived. I sat down on the grass and waited. The heat was stormy and oppressive. I went to sleep and dreamed of my childhood, of the forked lilacs of Elbeuf and of the white-and-pink anemones that faded in my hands. A noise awakened me. It was a big Flamingo plane landing. Lord Lloyd got out. I knew him, and went up to shake hands.

"I've come to see Reynaud," he said. "Is he still in Paris?"

"Yes, I think so."

It was his fine plane in which I was to fly; but when the pilot tried to start it, one of the motors refused to run. After twenty attempts the young flyer said angrily:

"And that's how we're winning the war!"

At that moment another Flamingo arrived—a much less elegant machine, but it ran—and I was told to get in.

FROM the Hendon Airport, where I landed, I had myself driven to the French Military Mission which was under the command of General Lelong. He received me cordially, inspected my traveling commission and sent me to Captain Brett who took me to the Ministry of Information. There I found Charles Peake of the Foreign Office, whom I knew.

"You want to explain the situation of France to the English public?" he

said to me. "You come at exactly the right moment. There is a press conference beginning in five minutes. You will talk to all our correspondents."

I protested: taken unaware, I had nothing prepared and to improvise on such a subject— But Brett, Peake and Sir Walter Monckton, who had joined us, dragged me onto the platform; and in breathless and burning phrases I described the martyrdom of France:

"It is not in 1941 that you must help us, it is not next month, it is not tomorrow; it is today, it is this hour, it is this minute—"

When I had finished, to my great surprise the three hundred journalists stood up and applauded. . . .

I had promised in the preceding year to deliver the Lowell Lectures in Boston in October 1940. And it had been agreed in Paris with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that even if the war were not over, I was not on any account to miss this important engagement. And so I had among my papers an order directing me to go to Boston.

Before leaving I went to say goodbye to Maurice Baring, who was living at Rottingdean near Brighton, and who was very ill. Lady Phipps and her son Allen, a naval officer temporarily on sick leave, accompanied me. Maurice, suffering from paralysis agitans, trembled so violently that his whole bed was shaken. On his shoulder perched a bright-feathered parakeet. The trembling which shook the bird, blended the colors and produced a confused and iridescent image. Baring's mind was intact. As was his custom, he talked on graceful, poetic and frivolous themes and ended suddenly on a profound, religious thought.

We left him after a short time in order not to tire him, and while waiting for train-time, all three of us went for a walk on the seashore. Everywhere soldiers were at work erecting barbed-wire entanglements and con-

structing casemates. A few more weeks of respite, and England would be ready to repel an invasion. The monotonous sound of the pebbles rolled by the waves calmed me. How many men and women would still come to this beach to the end of the centuries, and for them our frightful adventure would be only a cold page of history!

My boat, the *Monarch of Bermuda*, left from Glasgow. In "Tragedy in France," I have described that sunny crossing, the deck covered with children, the destroyers that accompanied us and my small cabin-mate Adrian Van Millingen. He was only seven or eight years old, but he had the courage and the deportment of a man. In my book I described him without giving his name or that of the boat. Nevertheless his family recognized him and wrote to me.

AT the end of ten days we arrived in Halifax. There I learned first from a Canadian newspaper man, and later from a telegram, that my wife was waiting for me in Montreal. Since our separation in Neuilly we had had no letters from each other!

It is easy to imagine my joy in finding her on the station platform at Montreal. From Canada we went at once to the United States.

To find ourselves once more in New York sadly evoked the shining memories of the preceding year. To our personal suffering was added the distress of finding public opinion in large part hostile to France. Not only was our unhappy country occupied, despoiled and humiliated, but it was slandered as well.

Hence came the idea that I ought to write with as much exactitude as possible what I had seen in this war and reveal what, in my opinion, had been the causes of the disaster. In haste I wrote a number of articles which were subsequently collected in a volume under the title of "Tragedy of France." When the articles were published, I received many moving letters:

"At last we can hold our heads up," wrote the sailors from a French boat interned in the harbor of New York.

"I wept a great deal while reading your book," said a little French dress-maker, "but you have restored my pride."

As for the British readers, all those who knew the facts considered that I had been fair in what I said about the relations between the two countries.

Following this publication the Dutch Treat Club, an important group of journalists and editors, asked me to come and talk to them about the lessons of the war. After that I was asked to talk at the Harvard Club, at Columbia University, at Town Hall, at twenty other places.

Solution to Crossword Puzzle on page 106

ARMS	AMEBA	FLOW
MOOT	BURRS	LASH
OMNIVOROUS	ATLI	
SEARED	SNAPSHOT	
REED	TURK	
ACCURSED	LOSSES	
CHAPS	BARTS	PAL
TOPS	TITUS	PAGE
ERE	CITES	BARRED
DESERT	DEBaters	
MAMA	SASH	
TROMBONE	REEFER	
ROPE	UNDERSTATE	
ABET	SUAVE	IRON
PENS	ELMAN	CENT

This activity was useful in helping me to bear the anguish we suffered over the news from France. Oh, but it was hard to substitute for the picture of the proud, rich country we knew this picture of misery and weakness!

The object of my trip to America was, as I have said, to deliver the Lowell Lectures at Boston. I found to my great surprise a loyal audience, for these lectures in a foreign language, of from four to five hundred people. Some were Frenchmen, professors or musicians from the Boston Symphony Orchestra; others were students from Harvard, others again Canadians, Belgians, Swiss and also numerous English people.

My host, Mr. Lowell, former president of Harvard University, was eighty-five years old and possessed of amazing youthfulness of spirit. One day when I had said that the United States was slow in preparing and that it should make a total effort, not tomorrow, but today:

"I don't agree with you," he said.

I asked in surprise:

"And when do you think the United States should make this effort?"

"Yesterday," said Mr. Lowell.

My lecture tour took me to the four corners of the United States. I traveled a great deal by air. In my childhood I had enthusiastically read and reread a book by Robida, "The Electric Life," in which aerial liners were described. At that time this seemed to be the maddest and most extreme of dreams. Now the classic waiting-rooms at the airports with their baggage scales, loud-speakers, floodlights in front and rest-rooms for the pilots seemed to me as familiar and matter-of-fact as the station at Elbeuf had been. I flew mostly at night above a black abyss which was brightened from time to time by enchanted cities and the blue and red jewels of signal lamps.

I spoke at Charlotte, at Palm Beach, at Atlanta, where I had luncheon beside a modest young woman with eyeglasses, who said to me toward the end of the meal:

"You know I write too."

"And what have you written?" I asked with polite condescension.

"I have written a novel."

"Oh, indeed. . . . And what is the title?"

"'Gone with the Wind,'" she said softly.

THE month of February I spent at Knox College in Illinois, and returned full of esteem for the good sense of the students and professors in the Middle West. In the traditions and customs of Knox there was something robust and healthy that seemed to me invaluable for America.

"Where do you get your ideas about life, death, morals and what you may

and may not do?" I asked twenty members of a fraternity who were sitting around me on the floor or on the arms of easy-chairs. "Do they come from books, from the courses you take, or from the sermons of some minister?"

"No," one of them said. "They come from our families."

"Do your father and mother talk to you about these things?"

"Very seldom; but without talking about them, they give us their example."

"Yes," another broke in, "we are all formed by our homes."

In the Eastern universities I had noticed in the case of certain young people an attitude of rebellion toward their family backgrounds. At Knox there was nothing of the sort. They said:

"I am a little more liberal than my parents, or a little more radical, but our fundamental beliefs are the same."

Then came the questions about the war:

"Briefly, what was the cause of the French disaster?"

"Lack of preparation, lack of troops, lack of national unity. Our soldiers had neither the necessary planes, nor tanks, nor artillery. We realized the danger too late. But one must add that the responsibility of England and of America is equal to that of France."

"Equal, sir? After all, England and America are going on fighting, while France—"

"England is going on fighting with a courage I admire, but all the same she is protected by the Channel, and America by the ocean. Imagine Illinois or Sussex lying between Loire and Garonne; they would have been occupied in July 1940."

"When you talk about American responsibility, just what do you mean?"

"I mean that America, by refusing to ratify the guaranty of the League of Nations, rendered this new war possible, even probable. The Treaty of Versailles was not a very pretty baby, but it was a baby that your country presented to Europe. You laid it on the doorstep and resumed your bachelor life. Today the abandoned child has grown up, and since it was badly raised it is giving you trouble. That's natural; after all, the poor boy never knew his father."

The time had come to fulfill another engagement I had undertaken: to participate in the summer session at Mills College, in California. We crossed the continent by plane. There is nothing more astonishing than the immense desert that separates the Middle West from the Far West. Seeing these stretches of arid ground, gray and cracked like the hide of an

old elephant, stretching as far as the eye could reach, we admired the pioneers who had crossed this country on foot or in their poor covered wagons. The ascent in order to cross the Rocky Mountains made us gasp for breath; but the descent at Reno, the rich and verdant oasis of divorce, and that over San Francisco Bay, the most beautiful of landscapes with its globular islands bald and volcanic that rose from the blue water, repaid us for our mountain sickness.

"Here," I said to my wife, "is the Promised Land."

It was even more true than I had thought. To me California remains the land of happiness. It is not overpopulated; it is fertile; it has the most constant and most healthful climate on the planet. It has beauty like that of Greece, sweetness like that of France, picturesqueness like that of Spain and vastness like that of Africa. Perhaps the East is more lively; the Middle West more energetic; but California is wiser. The citizen there is still not far removed from the pioneer.

I AM finishing this book high up in a tower overlooking Manhattan. . . .

Night is falling. Shadows envelop the city while myriads of lights spring up. A long string of rubies marks out Park Avenue; then suddenly they are replaced by a long string of emeralds. In the direction of the East River the earth is more thickly sown with lights than the sky of Perigord was with stars. The nearest ones are fixed; those on the horizon twinkle in the trembling mist, outlining unknown constellations. To the south towers and steeples glow. Illuminated by the white radiance of flood lights, pitted with dark holes, the giant figure of Radio City resembles a Brobdingnagian honeycomb raised against a stormy sky. The lines of the other buildings retreat and are lost in the night, but their bright windows rising skyward to the stars are like the stained glass of an immense cathedral, huge as the city. From these millions of faithful what prayer ascends?

Ah, I know very well what they would ask for if they were wise, or rather what they would swear to keep. It is what they have. It is this liberty, this tolerance, these relatively gentle ways. Happy America, remember our mistakes and our anguish; do not believe that the future can be founded upon contempt for the past; reform and preserve; work, do not destroy. What have these many catastrophes taught us? That there is no justice without discipline. I was and I remain a liberal; that is to say, I believe men are happier and better if they enjoy the essential liberties. But I know today that there is no liberty without security, no security without unity.

IT happened all so suddenly that it was a week afterward before I realized the comic as well as the tragic angle. I was up the Rio de San Juan country, paying a visit to the chief of the river tribe, when it started. I had just come back from the States, and as I had made the rounds from Dakar in Africa, to Kobe in Japan, it was two years since I had last seen the chief; and he was proudly showing me his new baby.

To me, it would have seemed unusual if he didn't have a new baby to show me every time I came back to his jungle. I remember one time several years before, that four convicts from Devil's Island had come across from French Guiana and were making their way down the river when they stopped at his hut for something to eat. Before he fed them, he proudly exhibited a new baby just two days old. Chief Muracho was a proud father and a good friend. I had been working for an oil company, and this was my sixth trip into the jungles.

We were sitting around his hut, talking, when suddenly the drums commenced to beat off in the jungle, slow, fast, fast, slow. In twenty seconds after the first few beats, every other person, every animal and insect in the jungle was quiet. It's a funny, queer feeling when the drums begin. I've experienced it many times in the Belgian Congo in Africa and other outlandish places, but every time it's the same queer feeling. When the drums beat fast, your heart beats fast, and *vice versa*.

ABOUT five minutes later the beating stopped, to be taken up by another tribe in the interior, much farther away, but still with that rhythmic beat, only now it was just like a whisper. Suddenly the whole jungle came awake, and the animals went back to their screeching and calling. While the drumming was going on, I was watching the face of Muracho, trying intently to fathom whether it was important news or not, that the drums were bringing.

Muracho would have made a good poker-player, if he had ever learned how to play cards. His face was expressionless. Earlier in the afternoon my coming up the river in the company launch had been heralded by the beating of the drums. Now I figured somebody was either coming up or down the river; but as the drum-beat came from downstream, they must be coming up.

While I was coming to this conclusion, Muracho had got up and spoken to his squaw, and she was calmly putting things in bags and sacks. Then I noticed that he was gone; and looking down at the landing, I saw him talking to my two Indians, who had been sleeping in the launch.

Drums in the Jungle

*A sailor writes of a weird
night in South America.*

by BOSTON
BLACKIE

There were a lot of gestures with hands and nodding of heads, and then Muracho was beside me again. By now I figured something important was up. When he spilled it to me, I realized that was what the drums had said. He never even batted an eye. "Revolution! Revolution!" It seems that the President had been dead two days, but nobody knew it at the capital, until finally some local Winchell got wise and spilled the news. When the people heard it, they started a revolution. Over two hundred were shot the same night. Now the news had penetrated into the jungles, and the natives were getting ready to move away from the river and back into the safer regions of the interior until everything quieted down.

There was a tanker loading oil down the river, and between us and the tanker was a gunboat. Our only chance was just to wait until it was dark, then slip by the gunboat without any lights showing on our boat, and notify the tanker that a revolution was going on, so that they could get clear before anything happened. If the gunboat crew had revolted, they would fire on anything coming down the river. If they were still loyal, they would also fire on anything coming down, so we were in a ticklish spot.

As soon as it got dark, my companion and I piled into the launch with the two members of the crew and started downstream. Presently I told the crew to cut the motor off—we'd better drift down without any noise, for we were approaching the location of the gunboat. My companion and I were standing in the bow peering ahead into the Stygian darkness when suddenly we were thrown off our feet by an awful crash. The gunboat had been coming up the river close to the opposite bank without any lights, when she discovered us—and then deliberately rammed us amidships.

The four of us leaped over the side of the sinking launch and swam to the bank fifty feet away. The current had taken us downstream quite a bit, so that the gunfire from the boat aimed toward the bank in a line with where we were sunk didn't come within a hundred feet of us.

The two Indians said good-by to us and started off into the jungle while we made our way down the river-bank. The jungle in the daytime is bad enough, but at least you can see the snakes and crocodiles, the monkeys and numerous unidentified animals that roam the jungles. We had to keep close to the river-bank, yet not too close. As long as we could hear the water gurgling, and the sounds of fish and animals splashing in the water for their supper, we knew that we were close enough.

Stumbling, sometimes even crawling through vines and dense foliage, we made our way downstream, always keeping the sound of water on our left side to keep from going in circles. Once when I stumbled, I reached out for support on a tree. I quickly pulled back my hand and fell flat when I encountered something furry. If I hadn't fallen flat, I would have lost my head, quick as a wink. The "something furry" was a large sloth dangling from the limb of a tree. The sloth is the slowest-moving animal in the jungle, when rambling, but faster than a bush-master when it comes to striking. Those three toes are equipped with razor-sharp talons that can cut a man's arm, leg or even his head off, with one swipe. I had once owned one, several years before, that I had bought from some Indians for two loaves of bread, so I knew how ferocious they can be.

FOR hours we struggled through the jungle, sometimes waist-deep in mud and water in the swamps, then slowly but surely ascending a hill or a mound fifty feet high and then down into the muck again, always keeping the river on our left. The slitherings and noises of jungle creatures around us kept us going at a fast pace, for that kind of traveling. Somewhere in that dank and dismal swamp my hands came in contact with some poison fungi, and twice a year since that time, my hands swell, and little blisters form on the palms and between the fingers. Several specialists have told me that there is no cure for it, and that every time that the plant blossoms, I will have blisters. Why couldn't it have been a century plant?

After what seemed days, we arrived at the dock where the tanker was loading.

We informed the captain of the uprising, and he let go all the lines immediately and started down the river for home; and as the U. S. A. was home, you can bet we went with him.



Drawn by Frederic Anderson

The corporal turned sharply, and fired. Nels did not wait to see his bride crumple, but smashed his chair on the corporal's head.

BACK to the SEA, VIKING!

The Freedom Senders and the other young Norsemen of 1942
fight their best against the invader. . . . A complete novel

by *David N. Benedict*



THE North Sea painted winter on the mountains and hung the scrub pine with frozen foam. It slapped spray against the

weathered houses that clustered in a timid village at the end of the fjord. It breathed stormily into the hall when Fru Linde opened the door. It drummed in chorus as she called to her children: "Not too late now."

"We'll climb the Black Hill and look for icebergs," announced Marya.

"No," replied her brother; "let's show cousin Nels some good skiing."

"We saw icebergs yesterday." Nels smiled politely.

A crowd of boys and girls swung round the hills and came up to them, panting and laughing. Some were sixteen, and some in their solemn dignity were eighteen. Marya introduced her cousin from over the mountains.

"Nels Anders, my second cousin and a brave man, but he cannot swim." They all laughed. "This is Hjalmar Halvorsen, the son of the doctor; and holding his hand is my sister Joanna, whom you know."

"Our sister is at a dangerous age," their brother said solemnly.

"Rolf!" Joanna cried with pleasant warning.

Rolf backed away and scooped up snow. "Nearly twenty and not married." He clucked compassionately. The doctor's son went after him. They kicked off their skis and tussled joyously in the snow.

Nels was puzzled. "Twenty?" He looked from Marya to Joanna. "Are you twins?" Marya blushed.

"Has this baby been adding years again?" laughed Joanna. "Come, Marya, tell him the truth. He is a cousin even if he is a stranger."

"Yes," they all echoed, "the truth, Marya, the truth!" But Marya shot away on her long skis. "The truth!" roared Nels, and followed. With wild yells the others pursued them, skis, sleds and nailed boots etching the hillside.

"Are you laughing at me?" Marya called back.

"I'm just laughing," cried Nels; "everything is good, and I am laughing." His shout hit the peak above them and boomed into the valley.

"I understand." And she paused.

"What do you understand, sly one?"

"Look, Nels!" she exclaimed suddenly. "We're alone. The others must have taken the lower trail."

"You look like the figurehead on a Viking ship, Marya."

"Come." She left the trail and carefully worked her way up the rough incline. Nels followed, admiring her swift vigorous movements.

"Where to?" he asked.

"Come," she said.

They crossed the timberline.

"You are a Viking. Are you also a Valkyrie on her way home to the clouds?"

"Down now!" They sailed down the other side of the crest. Then off came the skis, which were planted like flags in the snow. They tramped on foot into the snow-imprisoned woods. The air tasted like cold water.

With a big fir making an exclamation-point, the wood stopped. Marya leaned into the sea-wind. "Look!" The fjord sprang into view over the shoulder of the mountain. Nels felt its cold reach into him, and he stared with uneasy fascination at the black water lapping against the moss-dark rocks a thousand feet below. He drew back dizzily from the drop. "The North Sea," Marya said with wonder and joy.

"It's beautiful," he said; but already he could feel the tiny fingers of panic clawing. He turned his back to the sea and drew strength from the tall fir.

"Come," Marya whispered, "we're not there yet. We go down the cliff."

"Climb into that?" He waved at the water.

"No, silly! That's half a mile down."

He followed her down the rock face silently, close to the reassuring earth, the snow, the rocks, trying not to think of muttering waves below him.

"Some day I'll teach you to swim," Marya shouted up. He could not answer.

"Rest here," she commanded. She smiled approvingly at her cousin. He was a strong handsome boy, a climber, a fighter. She would teach him to love the sea.

They were in a crease in the cliff, surrounded by boulders that had fallen and were trapped.

"Marya," Nels called. "Marya!"

Where was she? He looked around and heard her laugh. "Where are you hiding, kitten?"

"Look, look, look—can't you see me?"

He grabbed a fistful of air and examined it intently. "Not there!"

Little chuckles played among the rocks. He tracked them to the end of the gully and found two bright eyes and a bright nose hiding behind a ragged bush. Then again she was gone.

"In here—the Viking's Cave." And he saw that she was in a large cavern, screened by the bushes and the boulders. In the back, ten feet from him, Marya sat regally on a flat stone.

"Welcome to the Empire of Frost," she exclaimed. "You may approach, O stranger!"

Nels removed his knit cap with exaggerated humility and bowed to the throne.

"I hear and obey, Queen of the Snows!" He knelt and kissed the royal mitten.

"Nels Anders, thou art overbold for a courtier. I will have my enchanters turn thee into ice."

"If that is to be my fate," he replied tragically, "I may as well freeze for more than a woolen kiss." And he took Her Majesty into his arms.

"Methinks not!" cried Marya. She dodged out of the cave. At the entrance he would have caught her, but she let the prickly bushes spring back into his face and made her escape. "I will have thee thrown to the serpent that lives in the fjord," she mocked.

"Marya! Oh, Marya! Nels!" They heard Rolf's voice faint in the distance.

"Don't answer," said the girl.

"Marya, where are you?" called her brother.

But they did not reply; and so it was not until they returned in the evening that they learned that the Germans had landed in Norway.

CHAPTER TWO



WITH thick brutal brushstrokes the Nazis daubed Norway brown. Horror, shame, and unbelief filled the Northern villages. Anna Linde waited for a husband who did not return, who

could not return unless he were to walk many miles along the bottom of the sea. Dr. Halvorsen's son, Hjalmar, did return, walking erratically, complaining of headaches in a strange hoarse voice, unable to sleep, given to gray misty visions, staggering in torment toward the clear air of the hills. Nels Anders had been a lieutenant in a ski patrol and many dramatic and fanciful stories drifted back to the Lindes, but Nels himself did not come.

The hero of the village was Sigurd Svan, a thin asthmatic boy with the pale eyes of a fanatic. He and Rolf Linde had organized their friends into a band of young vandals who set the harbor ablaze every night. They burned four German motorboats, and one exalted morning damaged a troopship and abducted a lean sullen Herr Oberleutnant. But as the grip of occupation tightened, resistance disappeared, till even Sigurd and Rolf stopped their nightly forays.

For two years Rolf planned escape. He was oppressed by an inexplicable restlessness and impatience. Now in the summer of 1941, he was seventeen, but he could not see where the road of his life led. When he passed the store, he wanted to go in and pull Mr. Ostergaard by his short beard and say, "Coward, traitor, you are afraid they will get your money, so you polish their boots with your beard!" When he saw Dr. Arnt Halvorsen trotting down the main street, pushing his round jolly face into every conversation, quizzing the German sentry with good-natured curiosity, Rolf wanted to seize him by the arm and twist it and say, "Coward, idiot, can't you see what they've done to your son? Why aren't you out shooting, strangling, knifing these wooden monsters?"

Rolf knew he was unjust, but he could not help thinking that if he had been at Oslo or Bergen, things would have been different. He felt himself very much a man; since his father's death he had not gone to school but had fished with the men.

During the day Rolf spoke to no one. And when he went home he would find his sister Joanna knitting frantically, and often his mother would be weeping. He and Marya would stand at the window watching the North Sea throw its frosty jewels into the oppressive air.

One day Marya found a sea-drawn portrait on the beach. A wooden Viking head that had led some ancient boat to destruction had been washed ashore. The sea had softened and ennobled its features with weeds and sand.

She brought the head home and named it "Eric the Red." Once, in reply to a joking question of Rolf's, she said it was a picture of the man she would marry.

When Joanna combed and plaited her shining hair in the morning, the younger sister would sit on the window sill and talk partly to herself, partly to the wind which carried the words down to the fjord.

"When I was little, I thought Father was the sea. I thought his nets, boots, and boat were for sailing into the water, not on it."

"That was strange, certainly." Joanna's voice followed the even rhythm of her moving fingers.

"Then, of course, in the end they did sail into it."

"I know, I know," her sister murmured.

"Do you think the Vikings looked like him?" Marya continued dreamily, "I often heard people say so. Dr. Halvorsen said he was proud to live in the same village as Father, for then he could know what a true Northman was. But the doctor is always joking."

"Northmen! I've seen no Northmen. There are none in the world. Marya, there are not even *men* in the world." Joanna's fingers left their weaving. She turned from the mirror and in her eyes was the light of anger that burned within, insidious and invincible as an underground fire.

At first, when Hjalmar came home, when two men carried him, gibbering, off the steamer, she had wept in love and pity. But as he screamed and struggled in what his father diagnosed as an epileptic fit, a light unwholesome froth appeared at his lips. After this Joanna could only think of him with horror and unreasoning anger. Gradually she drove his image into the locked storeroom of her mind, and lived in bitterness.

Joanna broke out again: "Perhaps there once were men. I have read about them. There are men in the Bible. But when I go to the village I cannot stand to look at them. I see snakes, and pigs, and wolves, big oxen with fur coats, little mice hiding in the doorways, and crows talking loudly in the store. It is terrible that there are no men. I look at Rolf and I think, what will he grow up to be—an ox or a rabbit, or a snake like those of the Hird that crawl up the streets of Trondhjem with their arm-bands, and even the Germans throw garbage at them. I think that in the whole world there are no men. There are the mad who beat, and the mad who are beaten, and the mad who are crushed dead hiding in the cellars. But they are all mad, and I have not seen one of them who is not." Joanna's voice dropped lower and lower, in the awful helpless manner of a child falling downstairs.

Marya looked for reassurance to Eric the Red, who regarded her with a lofty gaze from his hanging place on the wall.

"Joanna," Marya said,—but she was afraid to touch her sister,—"what has become of the men who sailed the ocean in their open ships? Eric the Red knew them; Father, I think, must have remembered them. And I remember too—a man in a stormy sea holding the tiller. The ocean is turned upside-down, but he only turns his pipe around and goes on smoking. He speaks low, but the wind cannot carry his words away. He does not kick the broken nets, but mends them, and his hands move quicker than a woman's. . . . That is the man I will have. That is the man he must be. Another Eric the Red!"

"Like that, Marya? Is he just a voice, a pipe and a fish net?"

"He must have gray eyes," said Marya soberly. . . .

With a heavy black crayon Rolf changed the design into a cross within a square. Four bold strokes made the swastika a symbol of faith and honesty.

Always on Sunday morning Rolf arose early and redecorated the main street. There was a company of German marines in the harbor, but they kept away from the village itself. Occasionally they would go up and break a few windows to impress the inhabitants. Most of the time they practiced landings and embarkations on the beach.

Their commander, von Klemmer, being a man of some education, was opposed to indiscriminate painting of swastikas, but his men, knowing the infuriating effect of the crooked cross on Norwegians, left that mark everywhere.

Rolf walked down the street whistling. As he passed Ostergaard's store, Sigurd Svan uncoiled himself from the doorway and joined him.

"Johan and Harald are up behind Suzansa's barn."

"Did you hear from those Ostraat fellows?" asked Rolf.

"Yes. They think they can handle the boat by themselves, at least till here. They'll pick us up in Herring Inlet." With pride Sigurd produced a dirty sheet of brown paper. "The message. It was brought by that barrel, von Klemmer, himself," he said.

"Von Klemmer? How? How was it done?" Rolf was overcome.

"Well, you know he goes down to Trondhjem every two weeks to make a report and to get expensively drunk. On the way back he stops at Ostraat to check on things there and to get drunk. Frequently he will buy some French brandy at Bergstrom's so that when he gets back here and there is not much to do, he will be able to get really drunk."

"That's well known," said Rolf. "Go on."

"Watch now. The brandy is put into a heavy paper bag. When the Herr Oberst von Klemmer comes home, alcohol runs out of his pores, but still he knows that in Norway you must not throw paper bags away. He rushes to Ostergaard's store, where they let him sit in the back room and drink (which is against orders), and when he takes out that bottle of brandy, I am there and I collect the bag. It rips down the middle and inside is the message!"

"But to take those chances . . . suppose he had destroyed the bag, or lost it, or suspected—"

"I had arranged five other ways if this failed. One involved invisible writing, and we had even figured out a way to cut a message in his coat-tails when he lay under the table."

"But we could have arranged it all when we met them on the hike, and not need all this secret-writing stuff."

Sigurd became angry. "Escape is adventure, not milking the cow!"

CHAPTER THREE



DR. ARNT HALVORSEN had always been dissatisfied with himself as a piece of sculpture. He admired his mind. It was

clever, inquiring, full of odd knowledge. But he wanted a tall square body, blond and blue-eyed, while his own was short, squat, and ochre, with garish pink cheeks. In his youth, when he still had ambitions of performing heralded operations in Oslo, he subjected himself to many grotesque experiments to add a few inches to his height. He hung from bars; injected hormones; ate raw meat, drank sauerkraut juice with pepper, which prescription he had from a Thirteenth Century professor of black magic; repeated every four hours the following words, "I am tall. I will be taller." He took up with a faith-healing cult for a time, then renounced that; planned electric stimulation of his pituitary gland but lost his nerve; and daily cursed his grandmother for marrying a small Dane.

It was useless; he did not grow. In fact, having lost his hair in the course of treatment, he became somewhat shorter. What was particularly annoying was the ease with which he increased in girth. While he could not add an Angstrom unit to his height, he had to order a new belt every six months—so that at the age of fifty, he looked like a G-clef.

Many people wondered why Dr. Halvorsen with his fondness for metropolitan newspapers should settle in an obscure fishing village. Mrs. Ostergaard whispered secre-

tively but frequently about illegal operations, but then Mrs. Ostergaard was overcritical and had even accused the pastor of reading a book on birth-control.

Contrary to general expectation, the doctor, defeated in ambition, disappointed in stature, and isolated in an unfriendly community, grew more and more cheerful and bustling, till it seemed he would burst into a shower of radiance. Only the sourest dispositions in the village could detect a trace of hate in his manner. This inhuman good nature had its effect. The women pitied the brave widower and helped him bring up his son Hjalmar. The men enjoyed his anecdotes and allowed him to lance boils and set an occasional broken arm. Finally the flood tide of their liking set in, and the gossipy little doctor became the pride and pet of the village.

But even the doctor's warmest admirers had been somewhat upset by his invincible fortitude when Hjalmar was brought home in a shattered and slightly manic condition. He had taken the same cheerful detached attitude that doctors apply for everything from a cold to meningitis.

Therefore, when Rolf and Sigurd saw the doctor jogging toward them, they turned into a side street.

"Ho there, Rolf! And who is that with you? Young Svan?" And, blowing and puffing, the doctor caught up with them. "Going to church?" he added, winking.

"It is early, Dr. Halvorsen."

"Well, it is too fine a day to be indoors. Now look at the fjord. Notice the colors. And how smooth today. Not a ripple. If you had never seen the sea before, you would think it was soft glass. Now wouldn't you?"

"I don't know," Rolf said uncomfortably.

"Boys are unobservant. They see things only as they are and not as they might be. Of what use is the human mind if it is only to register impressions? Now tell me, of what use is it?"

"Of no use, I suppose," said Rolf, while Sigurd Svan said nothing and walked angrily.

"No, a good mind sees not only an object, such as that boat next to the pier, but also the association of the object, as for example, fishing, racing, rowing; and the likeness, I might say the metaphors of the object, for example, that boat looks like a dish to put celery in, or half a pea pod; and finally the possible uses of the object, such as storing nets, going to Lofoten to fish, or going to England."

Rolf started and Sigurd growled, but the doctor continued blandly: "Thus if I looked at that boat, my mind would fill with hundreds of things that you miss." He smiled tolerantly. "Ah, here we are, home—won't you two come in and have a—an apple?" Dr. Halvorsen roared as if he had constructed an irresistible joke. "No? Well, then we shall sit on the dock till church-time and chat."

They listened politely for half an hour while the doctor chatted. "Everything is in observation and memory. You would be surprised at the multitude of things in my mind. I remember every word of my anatomy text, and could tell you the page and the line. Now take this map, for instance," and he produced a bulky parcel. "I would bet that I could reproduce every line from memory, although I have examined it only a few times since I found it in my father's old desk. Of course, possession of maps is now, strictly speaking, illegal, but it is an old family treasure and I would not want to give it up. . . . The water is always colder when it is so calm," he continued, bending his fat little body over and stirring the fjord with his hand.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed abruptly. "My watch! Run! Get a stick, Rolf. It is in the mud. Look under the dock."

Rolf and Sigurd were delighted to interrupt listening, and they searched with poles and muddied the water but could not find the watch. After a while the doctor said irritably that they must give it up, he was going to church, and doubtless the nymphs that live under piers had swallowed the thing up.

Sigurd waited excitedly for the doctor's departure and to Rolf's surprise began fishing again.

"Look!" Sigurd cried.

"The watch?"

"No. Here."

"What is it? A can?"

"Gasoline. Or oil. Twenty gallons. See in the water, under the back of the pier."

"Are you sure?"

"We can have a better look tomorrow. I saw it while looking for my watch."

But Sigurd was not listening. "We might borrow this some night," he said thoughtfully.

"I'd thought of that. Still—after all, we can't steal!"

"We'll put the money in the mail; that is the way they in Ostraa are paying for their boat. Take it, and two days after, anonymous payment arrives in the mail. A good Norwegian will keep his mouth shut."

The boys ran with the elation of those who possess hidden treasure. It was then that Rolf noticed that he still held the map. The doctor, in spite of his trained memory and the multitude of things in his mind, had forgotten it. Rolf shook it open. It was a mariner's map of the North Sea.

THE sea reached up, shattering into bits the picture of still, sultry air, and smooth worn rock. This wave, splashing into shore, belonged to a day two winters ago. The spread of static coastline was the same, but the boy and girl had changed from red-mitted youngsters. Something old shadowed their eyes, creased their smiles into gravity and brought careful words to their lips.

They had been standing a long while looking into the sea. His hand covered hers.

"The spray almost reaches here—you'll get wet," he said, glad of the words which would take them into the plains. The lapping, insidious water numbed him.

Ten days ago Nels had come; "and from Trondhjem," the whole village whispered. From the concentration-camp at Trondhjem where he had been held for a year and a half.

Six months ago he had been released, but had had to report daily to the authorities. He was free, but not to leave. He worked behind the counter of a small dry goods store. His salary was what the "Hird" owner pleased to give him. . . . That his own people would work him and starve him, Nels had not believed. When the probation period was up, he received permission to go home.

But Nels found that he had no home. His country was a vast concentration-camp, his friends spies, his family dispersed. He longed for a chance to pretend he was free again, to climb mountains, to ski through the hills; he went to visit Marya.

He found her unchanged—gay, confident, courageous. Enchanted by her lithe beauty, he soon thought it inconceivable that he should ever leave her. He did not add up his prospects. Watched by the Germans, hated by the Hird, penniless, tradeless, he was a soldier without an army, a patriot without a country.

But Marya saw a mythical stranger, a hero home from the wars, and she felt a shyness that was new to her. The ration cards that she had saved for Rolf's birthday were taken from their hiding-place between Eric the Red and the wall. There was a celebration.

Now she could not remember a time when she had not known this handsome striding soldier.

"Come, Nels," she said, and they climbed back over the rocks to the downs.

"Marya," Nels said, and neither knew when they had stopped walking. "You know why I came."

"No," she said, but she knew. . . .

"I am letting the North Sea decide. I draw 'Yes' and 'No' in the sand, and we will see which one is washed out first," Rolf proposed to Sigurd.

"Rolf, make up your mind!"

"I would like to talk it out. First, I do not think we ought to take that gasoline."

"Why not? It will be a good joke on the doctor. He was quite upset when I returned his map. He made me promise twenty times I wouldn't talk about it, which he does constantly."

"It's strange he should have kept that gasoline."

"Dr. Halvorsen is a clever man. It was a good map." Sigurd spread out the rough tracing he had made of the original, straightening the crease with the loving touch of a man who holds the road to freedom in his hand.

A wave came up and washed out the "No," signing its decision with a piece of seaweed.

"What kind of man is this cousin of yours?" Sigurd asked abruptly.

"Nels?"

"Yes. He fought, didn't he?"

"On a ski patrol. I don't know if he shot anybody. Why?"

"I think Johan will not come at the last moment. He is brave, but he likes to figure all the chances; and in the end that will scare anybody. In that case, we will need another man."

Rolf considered. He too was balancing chances.

"I don't know Nels very well. Besides I think he is going to marry my sister."

"Marry?" Sigurd was disgusted. "Doesn't he want to fight? How can you tell?"

"Oh, they look at each other all the time and smile and kiss without looking to see if they're alone. And she has carved his name on the back of Eric the Red."

"This is not a time for marriage and soft stuff," Sigurd said with intense contempt.

"Oh, he won't do. Also if we told him anything, it is the same as telling Marya, and you know how women are!"

"Of course," replied Sigurd profoundly.

Rolf rose and they walked toward the wharf. It was five o'clock in the morning, and the fishermen gathered on the pier seemed wrapped in a soft blue mist.

"The thing that bothers me is Dr. Halvorsen. I would not take the gasoline."

"Rolf, do you know what I think? The doctor is not as simple and gossipy as he seems. In his careless way he has let almost everyone in the village find out about that hidden gas."

"I never said he was simple."

"Well, either he's just careless, or—or he's a patriot." Sigurd laughed.

"He's not careless," said Rolf firmly.

"We need that gasoline."

"I will think it over."

"Think fast, Rolf!" And Sigurd seized his friend with a hard thin hand that felt cold on Rolf's wrist. "They are here from Ostraa. There is a boat in Herring Inlet."

IT was a long day for Rolf. His thoughts arose and battled and followed out the adventures of half a dozen lives. At five-thirty he went out in the small trawler with Ole Tonetsen and two others, friends of his father's, heavy awkward men, who worked steadily and methodically, pulling the long shapeless oars, hoisting the mildewed sail, rolling out the mass of nets; for now that gasoline was confiscated, these men fished and sailed much as the Vikings had done in their freedom.

Even now that Rolf did as much work as they, the boy knew that his presence on board was looked on as a favor, and this made silence between them. Nor did the men talk to each other. At noon one would perhaps grunt an answer to a question put at nine. Occasionally Tonetsen would mumble an order, but it was obeyed more through habit than comprehension. On this day the waters of the fjord were unusually calm and the sky hung low and pur-

ple, so that the fishers seemed to be in a velvet tunnel. Far down in the southeast the sun was a light behind many layers of indigo gauze. It was as if some giant child had built himself a rag universe.

Rolf was overcome by a feeling of unreality. He felt like a character in a dream. Through the haze the land appeared to be heavy brown smoke. The water steamed with mist, and yet he knew it was icy. The events of the past weeks now also had the irrelevance of fever-dreams.

FIRST that unexpected, strangely coincidental meeting with the Ostraat boys. Rolf remembered how he, Sigurd, Johan and Harald had hiked into the mountains for a week-end to escape stifling in the village. One could not draw a deep full breath of air in the presence of German soldiers and German flags. It tasted bad and would not go down. But up in the mountains it was possible to forget defeat, occupation, the Gestapo, starvation. The air was clean and cold, it belonged to no man, it came from unconquered space. So the four had gone; and some mysterious bond that linked free men had drawn three rebels from Ostraat into the same hills.

"Rolf, set the jib," muttered Tonetsen. "Wind," he added in a voice oddly compounded of explanation, apology, expectation, and doubt.

Rolf set the jib.

They had met in the mountains, made their plans, now he was setting the jib, now an Ostraat boat was hidden in Herring Inlet; tonight they would escape. The thought of the nearness of tonight tightened his throat. An uneasy desire for delay welled up in him.

They would not say good-by, Sigurd had decided. None must know truth that could be wrung out of them by the Gestapo. A trip into the mountains, just another hike: they would not be expected for several days; it would be too late for pursuit; therefore, no farewells. Rolf tried to picture his mother's face, but found he could not.

He could visualize Ingrid, however. Of late it was a game that he enjoyed; to close his eyes and let her appear, feature by feature. Finally she stood back against his eyelids, tall and pliant like a blade of wild grass. And suddenly he realized that he would not see her again, perhaps for many years. Well,—he shook himself,—thank God he did not love the girl.

"Take in the jib," grumbled Ole Tonetsen. "No wind," he said, expressing disgust, resignation and bitterness. They rowed back. On the dock Sigurd was waiting.

"Go home, have dinner, and get ready for the hike."

"Hike?" Tonetsen commented, meaning that if you were young and wanted to break your ankles scaling cliffs that was all right, but as for him a vacation was best spent at home with a pipe.

As Rolf turned into the lane that led uphill to his mother's house, he saw Ingrid coming toward him, gay in the evening haze, a will-o'-the-wisp wandered from the marsh.

"Good evening, fisherman!"

"Ingrid!"

"I have been churning butter with your sisters. And we are sewing some fine things. There are great things doing at your house!"

"Yes."

"I like Nels. Your sister is lucky."

"And you, Ingrid? I mean, how are you?"

"Well. And you? You look pale. Home to your dinner now, Mr. Fisherman. Good night."

"Good night. . . . Good-by," he called after her. He ran home.

"Aren't you hungry, Rolf?" His mother was concerned.

"Mother, tonight Sigurd and I and the boys are going to take that hike." He had told her before that the trip was planned and that they were only waiting for all of them to have free time together.

She sighed. One did not have much control over children these days.

"How long will you be gone?" she asked.

"Two or three days."

"What are you taking with you, Rolf?"

"My knapsack is packed."

"I will give you a piece of the honey-cake."

"Mother," he said, "I haven't room."

"The cake will take up no room," she laughed.

"All right."

Later, Sigurd called, and Rolf answered:

"I'm coming. Good-by, Mother."

"Good night, Rolf. Have a nice trip."

"Yes, Mother."

"Well," said Sigurd as they walked up the path, "did she ask you why you couldn't start in the morning?"

"No."

"Then she doesn't suspect?"

"Shut up," the boy said.

Further on, Johan and Harald joined them. Johan's eyes were red. He refused to talk. Harald whistled bravely but quite flat.

Sigurd alone was gay.

"Come on, Johan, they haven't dug your grave yet. What are you doing? Reciting epitaphs to see how they sound?"

Johan lowered his head. "Go to hell," he said.

Harald stopped whistling and began to hum.

"Don't make so much noise," Rolf commanded irritably. Harald looked at him and began to chirp.

They passed Svan's house, high in the hills: the poor bare farm, the broken fences.

"The old man is asleep," said Sigurd. "He doesn't like to be left alone."

Rolf strode on hurriedly. He felt a strong, inexplicable pity for the thin old grandfather, sleeping nervously, waiting for Sigurd's return.

"Enough false trails," said Sigurd. "Now we can cut down."

They left the path, and found a way over the hills. At Herring Cove they stopped and Sigurd whistled twice in a manner that indicated much planning.

There was movement in the bushes and an answering whistle. Two minutes later they were all in the boat listening to a tale of Viking adventure. The three from Ostraat all talked at once, but finally the oldest outlasted his companions:

"We had to leave early. I think the Hird got onto us. Two days in the North Sea; and I can tell you we were glad to sleep here all day today, all three of us. We could not have kept a watch if the whole German army had been hunting us. What worries me is the gasoline. We will have barely enough."

"There is a twenty-gallon tank under a dock in the harbor," Sigurd interrupted.

The three from Ostraat spoke together.

"Twenty gallons!" exclaimed the youngest.

"Is the harbor guarded?" said another.

"Where?" said the third.

"Brothers, do not take that gasoline. Don't go into that damn' harbor," Rolf pleaded.

"We need fuel," replied Sigurd, naturally assuming the leadership. "There is a guard, but they are very careless."

"Very careless," Harald echoed.

ROLF pointed over the North Sea. "We're going west. Let's go west then, and not take detours through a rat trap."

"Are you afraid?"

"I am afraid."

They were silent, thinking how the rope of events bound seven lives to a tin of gasoline.

The spokesman of the Ostraaters said reasonably: "Unless you know of some particular danger, Linde, why, I say, let's go!"



THEIR boat nosed along the shore line, running without lights, pushing carefully into the night, while Rolf stood in the

bow, keen as a hound. The air was heavy with storm, and black splintered clouds were shipwrecked over the sky. The boys paused at Andersen's dock at the edge of the harbor to hear Rolf suggest a try by land. But they decided that dragging the two-hundred-pound tank out of the water, and carrying it through town would be even more dangerous. So they shut off the motor and using oars as paddles, poled quietly on. They could hear the German patrol boat snorting along the other shore of the fjord, and they blessed the thick clouds that lay over the moon. The night grew colder; the wind moaned warning.

The Halvorsen pier sat fat and clumsy in one of the nooks of a "W" humorously printed in the shore line by the eroding fjord. The other armlet was little more than a marshy ditch separated from the pier by a finger of land. Here only reeds, moss and slime grew. However, on these summer nights an observant botanist would have found in the slime a well-camouflaged torpedo boat, and in the reeds a shredded deck of playing-cards. Four men waited in the torpedo boat. The more experienced watcher, a sergeant of four campaigns, had rigged up an ingenious warning system to permit them to play cards undisturbed.

When Sigurd and Harald cut the rope and tugged the gasoline tank over to the side of the boat, Halvorsen's pier gurgled with relief and rose three inches to a more comfortable floating position. The shore end of the little dock acted as a hinge for this rise, and the last two boards, closing up, pinched a home-made detonator composed of a little fulminate of mercury mixed with gunpowder in a cartridge cap.

There was a flash and a shot.

Four boys pulled at the tank. Rolf spun the motor. Johan turned back and forth in bewilderment. As the boys' boat sped out of the inlet, they found themselves followed by a long low craft with a machine-gun, two torpedo tubes, and a small cannon. The German sergeant calmly picked up the cards and reminded his companions of the score.

For a minute the pursued did not realize they were counters in a game. They urged their boat forward with every motion and thought, and cheered to see more and more water between them and the Germans. Then they caught sight of the patrol boat. It moved quietly, almost lazily across the fjord, cutting off their escape. . . . Looking around, they found the torpedo boat between them and the shore, and in one crushing instant understood their folly. Their last chance had been at the moment of discovery. Had they sped for shore and fled, each one for himself, some at least would have got away. Now the two German speedboats, moving as in a board game, closed the trap with sadistic slowness.

"Oh, God, if I had a gun!" one of the boys from Ostraat repeated over and over again.

"Do something!"

"Break for it!"

They all looked at Sigurd.

"Rolf," he commanded, "take the tiller. Make a circle and head straight for that one." He pointed to the inshore boat.

"God, how long will the dirty devils hold their fire?" said Harald. Johan sat in the stern looking down. His pale lips prayed. The Ostraat boy begged the earth, the sky, the waters, for a gun.

Sigurd bent in the bottom of the boat. His face gleamed with a sallow unholy light. He tore off his shoes. He unscrewed the cap of one of the smaller gasoline cans, soaked his sock in the liquid, and pulled it halfway out. He

screwed the cap on again, and his sock dangled weakly from the can like the tail of a beaten dog. A burst of firing split the soggy air.

Rolf steered the boat directly at the shore; the Germans flew to cut them off, filling the air with machine-gun bullets. The boy who had cried so loudly for a gun now held his shoulder and screamed nonsense. Rolf felt his hand grow numb on the tiller.

As they came alongside the torpedo boat, Sigurd lit the sock and threw the can. He felt the strength of ten heroes in him, he fancied himself lifting trolls by the belt—and in his triumphant attitude he received four bullets in the chest.

The improvised fuse flared and the gasoline tin exploded in the air. As the Germans ducked instinctively, four of the boys dived into the water. Of the rest, two were dead and the third hung on to the gunwale and wept into the wood. . . .

The entire torpedo squadron came to the rescue of their comrades. They deployed as if each boy were a battleship. In fact, there was such firing and whistling and roaring that the people in their houses assumed a Commando raid was in progress and hid in bed or climbed hills according to their natures.

Three of the swimmers choked on the cold water, swore bitterly to themselves, bravely and desperately tore toward land. They followed their instincts right into the blaze of searchlights and the slap of shot. The torpedo boats ringed the shore and picked their prey off with ease and simplicity. A searchlight-beam, a shot, and a head would flop over like a duck in a shooting-gallery.

Rolf was lucky. He jumped out of the other side of the boat. He swam ten yards before he realized that he was going in the wrong direction—out toward the middle of the fjord. And he swam another five yards before he realized that *that* was the right direction.

His friends were trapped by a battery of searchlights; he had only to dodge one occasionally. To no orderly-minded German did it occur that there was a young madman in the middle of the fjord, swimming out to sea.

"Lord," Rolf prayed, "do not let me become numb; they will go away, and I will come in."

He swam little—to conserve his strength; but the cold water squeezed the blood out of his limbs.

Here came a searchlight. He thought, "duck!" He had to tell himself what to do. He felt as if he were hovering above his body and directing it. Duck!

He took the opportunity to loosen his shoelaces.

Next time under he pulled his shoes off. Don't let them get numb, he pleaded, as the water curled around his feet.

"I will swim to the point opposite Anderson's pier," Rolf meditated: "rocks are there and they can't get in."

"Good God," he thought, "am I going to die? Sigurd is dead. . . . Is Rolf going to die now?" he said softly, considering himself from above.

He felt ice forming in his head.

He decided to stay where he was and float. A beam of light swept the water. Duck!

He came up and saw it flash back. Duck again!

"Go away!" he said soundlessly.

His arms moved up and down, keeping him afloat. They had been doing this for twenty minutes, and now moved of their own accord.

"Damn them," he groaned in a burst of hate, "they shot Sigurd. They must have shot them all."

He was recalling the fiery swoop of Sigurd's gasoline bomb, when a cramp tangled his left leg. Oh, Lord, it was numb!

His left calf was a hard knot and burned in intolerable pain. Both his hands were around it, squeezing. He went down, swallowing great drafts of water. It was icy.

He pressed and punched the swollen muscle till blackness hit him in the eyes. He came to on the surface with a freezing wind searing his face. It was starting to rain.

Somewhere, far off,—at the bottom of the sea perhaps,—his leg ached.

He discovered with surprise that his hands were still beating up and down. Affection for these faithful arms poured over him. He struck out for shore.

A whistle blew inshore; the squadron re-formed and cruised back to the harbor. Ten minutes later Rolf, wearily lifting his face out of the water, discovered that the fjord was empty. He could not see a boat.

Shortly after that, he could not see anything. He was wrapped in a curtain of rain. Every once in a while a convulsion of fear would shake him but it would pass, and his arms stroked on mechanically. He did not care, he did not know he was swimming.

It began to lighten and he caught sight of shore. The current had taken him far out of the harbor, but it had also swept him closer to land. Hope warmed him, when suddenly piercing pains flashed through every part of his body, an insupportable weariness glued his arms, and he sank again.

"No, no, no, no!" he thought.

He struggled. He forced himself to struggle.

He beat his legs and thrashed his arms. When he came to the surface again, each breath tortured him. He felt as if he were swallowing knives. He swam with his eyes closed.

Gradually Rolf felt new strength steal into him. He felt the wind helping him, the waves pushing him.

Land was close now. . . . Rolf had been in the fjord for three hours and twenty minutes.

CHAPTER FIVE



WE will give our listeners a portrait of Herr Oppressor von Klemmer, Chief Murderer in the little town we pass through on

our way to Trondhjem. Those who have had time to roll in the Trondhjem gutters may on occasion have met Herr Klemmer crawling out of a neglected manhole. He is easily recognized by the beer pouring out of his ears. But we would not waste time describing this large slug if not for the fact that he has a particularly insidious and dangerous talent. Wherever he goes he leaves a trail crawling with spies. Whether he threatens in the name of the Gestapo or bribes with smuggled French brandy, we do not know. We do know that in every town he has been in, loyal Northmen have been seized in the night, beaten, tortured, buried in concentration-camps," said a voice.

Von Klemmer glared at his radio. The back of his neck swelled and turned red, then heliotrope, then purple, while the smooth high tenor voice continued:

"Our investigations are naturally limited by lack of facilities, but we have the names of the following spies and agents of Klemmer. In Ostraat, Martin Kanelsen, carpenter, 17 Christiania Street. Four men have met death or imprisonment after gossiping with this living garbage-can, Kanelsen. Remember that name, Martin Kanelsen, carpenter. . . . Speak to him only with cold steel!"

"Schultz!" the Major roared. "Schultz!"

Schultz came in and saluted.

"Sol!" bellowed the Major, roaring louder now that it was unnecessary. "That was fast! Screwing your thick ear into the keyhole again! Listen to this!" He pointed to the radio. It was a gesture that shook the room.

"I cannot understand Norwegian well, Herr Oberst, you know that," Schultz replied with coarse slyness. "Did I hear cognac mentioned?"

"Don't stand there and let words spill out of your foul mouth!" yelled von Klemmer. "Shut up, Schultz! Now pay attention. Blow the retreat and get those hunters off the lake. Shooting children is no sport."

"It is not sport, Herr Oberst, merely a maneuver."

"Do not interrupt or I will have your underlip sewn to your forehead! Every motorcycle and truck we have is to be on the roads in five minutes. Wire Trondhjem, Bergen, Ostraat and any place else you can think of and let us get the angles on this fellow."

During this talk, the Major and his sergeant were cooperating on work of a comparatively delicate character. Schultz operated the handle of the directional aerial that was on the roof, and von Klemmer entered the bearings on a large scale map of central and northern Norway.

They were saved the trouble of tracking the broadcasters down, by these gentlemen themselves.

"Some people have denied our presence in Norway and claimed that our programs originate in the British Isles," the tenor continued. "To prove that these broadcasts come from Norway, and there are still free men in Norway, we the free speakers are paying a personal visit to our guest star tonight, von Klemmer. We have mouse-trapped two stupid sentries, and right now we are at the eastern end of the great fjord which German torpedo boats have turned into 'Klemmer's sewer.' We can see the full clouds gently brushing the sea in pity for our chained country. We can see the German boats maneuvering in the harbor, practicing their executioner's aim. We can see the strong line of the hills beyond, which say in the oldest tongue of the north, 'Northmen, free men, take heart, endure, resist, fight! . . . Deliverance is at hand!' We can even see the hut of the commandant not a hundred yards away, and I think I will try to break the window—"

"Thunder and damned lightning, the cursed foxes are in our doorway," von Klemmer bellowed. "At them!" Bugles blew, sirens wailed, whistles squeaked. The chase was on.

The entire company shifted from boats to cars and joined in this second pursuit. It was more to their taste. They were after the famous Freedom Senders. Here they had to deal not with unarmed children but with experienced guerrillas. On the lives of each Freedom Sender the Gestapo, being short of money, had placed a price of two months' leave. Schultz slammed the accelerator to the floor, while von Klemmer flattened his nose against the windshield in angry impatience.

For twenty minutes they raced, and then the Germans lost the track. They had to go back and follow on foot the trails of four small sharp-treaded tires. They discovered the sharp swerve through bushes and undergrowth that had shaken pursuit. They traced the trails to a narrow reedy path that twisted back toward the fjord. But here, too, puzzling disappointment followed.

"Herr Oberst," the scout reported, "it is impossible, but that car must be an aeroplane. The road comes to a large flat place, a meadow of stones, you may call it. Of course, no more tire marks. On three sides is wood, every inch of which we search; no trail. On the fourth is the gulf, the fjord. There is no other trace."

"I will look myself." But he found nothing.

ROLF was dreaming. He sat on a coral throne at the bottom of the sea; he wore an iron crown. This was so large it rested on his nose and annoyed him greatly. Sigurd urged him to take it off and run. Then it was his father who stood at his side and with a large iron handle rocked the ocean floor, producing tremendous waves.

Rolf awoke. He could not see. There was a bandage around his eyes; his arms and legs ached. He could tell by the rocking motion that he was in a boat.

The boy reached up to remove the cloth over his eyes. "No!"

Rolf did not move. That deep voice had strength and command. Another spoke, a pleasant tenor, somewhat high: "Lie still. Are you feeling better?"

"Lord," thought Rolf, "who is that? I have heard that voice before, somewhere—probably long ago."

"My pajamas are a little tight on you—but your clothes are drying."

That was true—the pajama pants cut him. Aloud Rolf said, "Where did you—find me?" He had decided only to ask questions about himself.

"On a rock with your feet in the water and your tongue hanging out of your mouth like a spent dog," the high voice answered. Rolf could hear the other man moving around. The boy judged it was he who was smoking that powerful pipe.

"We can take him ashore now," said the first speaker.

The two men lifted Rolf, and he could follow in fancy his path up out of the cabin of the boat, the rough jerk across to shore and the canvas smell as they entered the tent.

"Let's have some introductions," continued the garrulous one. "I am called 'Dial' and this is the 'Headman'. You are Rolf Linde, and if I can judge by the letter in your pocket you weren't swimming last night for fun. Incidentally, I can understand how you couldn't bear *not* to write that letter, and I also admire your sense in preventing yourself from giving it to Ingrid. But really you should have burned it."

Rolf leaped up. "Thief!" he cried. "Give that back!" His arms were seized as he tore at the bandage. He felt infuriatingly helpless in the grip of the older man, and what maddened him most was the calm pipe puffing by his ear. "Who are you, devils?" the boy cried. "Where are we? Where is my letter? Take this damn' thing off my eyes, cowards. Who are you? Answer!"

"Norwegians," said the Headman.

"Sit down, Rolf," added the other, his voice raised even higher in impatience. "This is not an American film with slamming on the table, loud yelling, insults, and drawing of guns because I have read your letter." He chuckled. "I know you, Rolf. Your father was my friend. Your friend, Sigurd Svan, is my friend."

"Svan is dead," said Rolf shortly.

After a while, Dial replied in a much lower key, "Last night?" Rolf did not answer.

"Come," pleaded his questioner, "you can trust us. We saw the commotion on the lake. We found you, half drowned, not a mile from the German harbor. Rightly or not, I read your letter. God knows any man that attempts so difficult and dangerous an escape, deserves our admiration and help. We will do all—"

"Enough," said the Headman, and to Rolf the tobacco smoke in the tent seemed to thicken.

After a pause, Dial spoke again, somewhat self-consciously. "He is right. If you do not wish to talk, that is all right. My advice is to say, when you return, that you became separated from your friends, got lost, even before they started—disclaim all knowledge of their flight, say, in fact, that they tried to lose you, shake you off. . . . You were deserted, or rather just lost—had no provisions, slept out, wandered around. . . . I don't think they will give you much trouble. In my opinion, the Germans may not even know you were one of the—" He stopped, searching for a word.

"Heroes," said Rolf bitterly.

They led him into the hills, still blindfolded.

"Give us five minutes to get away," said Dial, "before you take it off."

"Good-by, hero," said the Headman, with a vast laugh.

Rolf found himself on a ridge overlooking the south side of the fjord, and remembered the day he and his friends chased Marya and Nels in the snow.

"Well—home!" said Rolf. . . .

The tossing, unquiet sea formed a background, the straggling pines a frame, so that the house of Peter Svan was saved from complete barrenness. It lay set apart from the village, a small brown patch against the shoulder of the bluff. The weather, slipping in through a thousand cracks, browned it equally on the inside.

Midst a bizarre confusion of model ships, mounted fish, charts, maps, nets, line, dishes, broken chairs, schoolbooks, and odd pieces of clothing, sat old Peter Svan, contentedly smoking his pipe and wondering idly at the length of time it took Rolf Linde to climb the path.

"Rolf boy," his jolly voice bounced down the trail, "are you feeling the weight of those seventeen years, that you climb so slow?"

"Mr. Svan—"

"Yes, boy, yes? What will you have? Do you need something still for that hike of yours? I thought you boys would be— Good Lord! What has happened?"

Rolf went inside, unable to talk.

"Here, Rolf. Have you been playing tricks down at the harbor? Why, when I was the age of you—"

"It's Sigurd, Mr. Svan. He is dead."

The old man smiled twistedly. "What? Sigurd dead? My Sigurd? Nonsense! It is nonsense." He sat down very slowly. His fluttering fingers found a small wooden ship, which they turned over and over.

"Running on the rocks—he tripped—fell into the sea," Rolf explained in unhappy bursts.

Peter Svan closed his eyes. His chair shook dizzily. Then he sprang with horrifying agility, his old bones creaking and scraping in their sockets.

"What cock-and-bull story is this? What boy's trick are you playing, son? Sigurd fall from the cliffs? Does an eagle fall from the sky? Stop this now. Tell me where he is!"

"Please, Mr. Svan, he fell—"

Sharp fingers dug into the boy's shoulder.

"Where is my grandson?"

"Dead." (And Rolf wanted to shout, "Dead in the boat; dead from the guns that wouldn't stop; dead to give the rest a chance; dead because he had to stand up and show them who threw that burning can—dead because he was Sigurd, too long alive in a dead country!")

Rolf looked at Peter Svan and repeated slowly:

"Dead. He fell into the sea."

CHAPTER SIX



HE soft mixed colors of twilight marked the earth with the jumbled beauty of an overturned palette.

The kind hand of evening softly closed. Breezes whispered consolation. Forget, said the dusk. Be content, said the stars.

One brown spot in the darkening green twinkled with yellow lights: there was a wedding in the house of Anna Linde.

It was forbidden for more than seven people to assemble. Von Klemmer's edict was strict: seven people constituted a party, eight a riot. Therefore the rejoicing after the wedding was subdued and furtive, for, including the minister and the lookout, they were twelve.

All day Marya had been directing her thoughts away from the central point of her marriage. She did not permit herself to dwell on anything closer than that day, a fortnight later, when she and Nels would go down to Trondhjem by steamer. This voyage she dreamed about frequently and wept that its days would be so few. For two weeks now, Marya had been in the grip of a joyous, nearly hysterical excitement.

"Are you happy?" everyone asked her, but she did not know. She was intoxicated with the adventure. Perhaps the only thing that she regretted was that her lover did not carry her off in his skiff, Viking-fashion.

Now, safely seated in her mother's cherished armchair, holding the hand of this husband who knelt at her feet, Marya suddenly understood that she had been married, and was overcome with wonder. Mrs. Ostergaard, the

storekeeper's wife, a tub of a woman, came to remark for the tenth time on the beauty of the bride.

"When I was young I had such hair," she said in a loud voice.

"Yes," said Marya, smiling.

Nels squeezed her hand. How long did this have to go on, he wondered.

The pastor came by and excused himself. There was no further need of him, he pointed out with a deprecating laugh; so he would go home and obey the curfew.

"Take the old man with you," Mrs. Ostergaard pleaded. "He has started singing again."

NOBODY could understand why Mr. Svan rocked in his chair and sang. Mrs. Linde had tried to lead him into decent and serious conversation, as befitted an old man and a mourner. But he winked at Nels, and demanded to dance with the bride.

"Weakness. Senile," remarked Mr. Ostergaard significantly, and made a sucking sound with his chubby lips. "Why are those two imbeciles here?" he whispered to his wife. "For to be frank, they are neither more nor less than imbeciles—the old one and the young one." And he nodded toward Hjalmar Halvorsen, who was flattening his twitching face against the window in a vain effort to melt through into the enchanted night. Joanna ignored him as long as she could, then suddenly went to the kitchen to make coffee.

From the first Rolf had felt angry with each of his mother's guests. Since his return, he had been angry with almost everybody he met. He sat on the steps with Ingrid, and stared gloomily while she relived the wedding ceremony. What were they celebrating? he wondered.

Mr. Peter Svan was the only one who knew the answer to this question. He felt quite content. The room was warm. That was good brandy in the coffee. Marriages! Yes, they were pleasant affairs; it was good to see people in love, good for an old man to warm himself at their glowing joy. For truly, he was now an old man, and his eyes hurt continually, and in the mornings his ears rang like a bell-buoy; but he could remember when he had been young and in love too, with as many as five beautiful girls at once. He would go over and ask the bride to dance. That was an old custom.

"It is too bad Sigurd is not here," he said to Nels, "though I think he would have been jealous." The old man chuckled. "I think he and every other youngster in the village was in love with our pretty Marya."

"He was a wonderful boy, and my friend," Marya replied gently. "Please sit down, Mr. Svan."

"I was going to ask for a dance, but I see you are not anxious. Well, it really is too bad Sigurd could not see all this. He will have to congratulate you when he comes home. . . . Tomorrow or the next day. He's been away overlong on this hike," said the old man plaintively.

"Stop it, Svan," Ostergaard interrupted irritably. "The boy is dead. You know it."

Peter Svan nodded. "Yes, I know. But it is easy to see those stories are nonsense. Where is the body?" he demanded triumphantly, with an air of having once and for all settled the argument.

"Please, Mr. Svan, have a little coffee." Mrs. Linde hurried over nervously.

"A long time," muttered the tall old man to himself; "they could have hiked to Bergen in that time." He shook his head in uncomprehending anguish.

"Come!" Dr. Halvorsen shouted from the other end of the room, where he had been talking a duet with Mrs. Ostergaard. "A little merriment!" He winked facetiously. "Is there a radio, Mrs. Linde?"

Of course there was no radio, but everyone knew somebody who had one; naturally, you couldn't tell who, but they had heard the Freedom Senders several times, and

it was a soul-strengthening thing to hear a Norwegian speak his mind again. The doctor led the conversation, relating many anecdotes about the famous outlaws: how they were supposed to have dismantled their car at the end of a blind alley and packed it five miles over the hills to reassemble it on another road; how one day they roared through the streets of Trondhjem blasting defiance, and disappeared before the Germans could catch their breath; how even the German officers listened in to the Freedom Sender broadcasts to get forbidden world news; how with a sound-effect record they had demoralized a concentration camp, and nearly freed a thousand Norwegians—and more and more deeds of improbable heroism till the hearers realized that Dr. Halvorsen's active imagination was taking a part in the game.

"Marya," Nels tugged her sleeve. "Let's sneak out for a second."

"What?" She had been listening raptly to the doctor's recital, her eyes widened, her lips parted.

"Marya," Nels whispered with an unhappy laugh, "when does this end? Come out. Speak to me alone for a second."

"Yes, Nels—we must find Joanna," she announced aloud, and drew, in fact pulled, Nels toward the kitchen.

"There, Nels," she exclaimed, "it can be done! That is what we must do! What we must be! Oh, I love you!"

"What?" he asked blankly.

"You heard. The Freedom Senders. I heard them once at—well, I'd better not talk here with all these people, but when we get to Trondhjem, we will plan. We will think it out, and help Norway the way they do. You will be a great leader."

"Shh." He kissed her into quietness. "What is that?"

SOMEONE had knocked firmly and importantly on the front door. "Mrs. Linde? Excuse us. Just making the rounds. A party?" Four German soldiers stood at the door, and their spokesman demonstrated his Norwegian with pride.

"Come in, please," said Mrs. Linde timidly, after they had stepped by her. The guests tried to efface themselves, but in the general confusion the bottle of brandy which had supplied the wedding toasts was left on the table.

"Ach! Cognac!"

"May we?" said the literate one with burlesque politeness. The bottle disappeared into his pocket.

"*Ha! Es giebt eine Braut!*" One soldier caught sight of Marya in her wedding dress.

"*Und der Brautigam!*" exclaimed his companion, clapping Nels on the back.

"Why weren't we invited to this wedding?" the leader asked with mock severity. "Enough jokes," he snapped; "we are here on orders. Any radios?" turning to Mrs. Linde.

"We have none. We have never had any. I beg of you, come back tomorrow."

"Read!" the corporal said to one of the troopers. "The soldier gravely read a long proclamation in German.

"In your language that means orders are given radio subversion is to be crushed out, complete. A general search for radios to be executed tonight."

Then they tore the house apart. . . .

They looked for radios in the pantry, in the apple-barrel, in the chicken-coop; one soldier recalled that midget radios could be hidden in a pocket or a bouquet, and suggested searching the suspects personally.

"It is only orders," the corporal said as Mrs. Linde winced at cries of wounded furniture. "Personally we are friends. I congratulate the bride."

But the bride did not want to be congratulated in that way and dodged behind the armchair.

"Get out!" said Nels.

"Shut up," replied the corporal, knocking him down. With a glad cry, Rolf tackled the German from behind.

Old Svan picked up a plate and hopped around excitedly looking for a target. The three soldiers hadn't had a decent brawl in months, and they strode forward with joy. An attempt to pacify the fighters was made by Ostergaard and the doctor, but a punch in the eye brought prudence to the storekeeper, and he contented himself with moving the furniture out of the way. The idiot Hjalmar ran whimpering about the room.

Nels backed into a corner and held a chair as a shield; Marya dashed into the kitchen with the wild idea of getting a carving-knife to equalize the battle. Rolf struggled helplessly in the grip of two troopers, while the corporal, whose anger seemed completely directed toward Nels, drew his pistol, and holding it blackjack fashion by the barrel, advanced. In his frenzy Hjalmar knocked over a lamp, and now there was only one left burning in the room. Its light produced strange troll-like shadows.

Startlingly, Marya appeared at the door not two feet from the German corporal, waving a curved knife. The kitchen floor was covered with rejected weapons.

The Germans roared warning to their commander. He turned sharply, and automatically reversing his gun, fired. Nels did not wait to see his bride crumple, but smashed his chair on the corporal's head, and sprang forward.

Next second there was darkness. Hjalmar, who had been repeating "Stop! Stop! Stop!" violently, stopped the scene as far as he was concerned by snuffing the last lamp.

Nobody moved for a moment. Then everyone rushed to the door. The Germans shouted instructions, but the corporal's voice was absent. Three sharp cracking sounds indicated that someone's eyes were getting used to the dark, that he was taking pot-shots. It was the soldier who had read the proclamation. He had calmly rolled under the couch and fired every time a person passed the window.

Nels had leaped right into the embrace of another soldier, and it took him a minute to punch himself free. He felt a stinging slap on his shoulder, and seeing the window's light behind him, dropped to his knees and crawled close to the wall. He must get to Marya. Striking wildly into the air, Nels stumbled toward the kitchen door.

The front door sprang open. Rolf stood across the threshold defiantly. His arm barred the way. He turned his head to look down the road and shouted into the empty night: "Run! Run, Nels! I'll hold them."

The soldiers picked themselves out of the corners they had smashed into in the darkness, and charged Rolf. The marksman under the couch covered their advance. Nels stepped into the kitchen.

"Here! This way." Whose voice was that? Marya's! So vividly had he imagined her falling, shot, murdered, that Nels was astounded, almost offended to have her pull and direct him. He felt irritable and his shoulder hurt.

"Nels, we must run!" They fled for the hills.

The Germans, pushing past Rolf, saw only a bare road. One thought he heard noises in the woods, and fired at random. Then they went in and lit a lamp. Their corporal lay on the floor in a crouching position as if he was preparing to spring. Red streaks wet his hair.

Mrs. Linde sat beside the wounded man. Somehow, in the dark, she had contrived to fill a kettle, and now she dabbed timidly at the broken head.

Dr. Halvorsen came from behind the armchair to help. "An exciting wedding," he said, recovering his good nature.

A CHIAROSCURO of tangled forest gulped them up. Scarcely perceptible, the two moving shadows made their way, pressing into the trees and underbrush. Panting, they leaned against a giant pine. His arm was about her, and for a moment she allowed herself to sink against him; then pulling back, she drew him on again. "Come. We're safe beyond the timber line." She led him along the same rough crest they had climbed that morning two years ago when the bold courtier first swore fealty to his Snow Queen.

How sinister and unfriendly her forest seemed now, every tree and rock an ambush, every rustling of leaves a German gun! Their feet stumbled and slipped in the darkness. As they came over the last ridge, Nels fell.

"Nels," she whispered, "what is it?"

He lay still, only his sides rising and collapsing in short moaning breaths. Marya lifted him to a sitting position. Her hand under his armpit was damp with the stickiness of drying blood.

"Nels—oh, my Nels!" And then: "Can you stand? Nels, we're close to the Viking's Cave. Maybe a hundred yards. Let me help you."

With an effort he pulled himself up, and she held him against the cliff. The moon hung like a lantern in the sky, its rays picking out from the etching of shaded mountain a strange, malformed, eight-legged animal, toiling on its belly up the steep grade. At the mouth of a cave the creature disentangled itself. Marya laid her husband on the floor, and working by feel in the dark, bound up the bullet wound as well as she could. The bandage was stripped from her wedding slip. She leaned against the rock that had been the Snow Queen's throne, and held his head in her lap.

It hurt her to hear Nels moan in his sleep. But when he was still, she feared he had fainted.

Distorted forms of darkness kept her company through the long night. They looked like the goblins of Norse folktales, crouching low, encircling her.

That rock, peering from the corner; those branches, stealing closer. . . . The rock, two years ago a throne. . . . "He kissed my mitten, my red mitten. It's my wedding night, my wedding night now. Oh, Nels! . . . Oh, please don't let him be hurt badly. . . . Sleep, my darling!"

"The way the branches lace over the mouth of the cave, and the starlight that flickers in the spider's web, the spider's web, light, lacy—I must think what to do, I must think. I mustn't sleep, mustn't look, mustn't dream. They would kill Nels, shoot him, even if the soldier wasn't dead; they'd kill him; because of having been at Trondhjem, in a concentration-camp, they'd kill him, kill him. . . . O Lord, some way, some way, Lord, grant him Thy protection. . . .

"Sleep, my husband. . . .

"I will go to von Klemmer. Perhaps. . . . Would he? I will plead, cry, on my knees. No. His puffy face, the lines by his mouth, wouldn't let him. He wouldn't listen; he'd laugh. . . .

"That noise? Are they tracking us?"

"Calm, Marya. Think. . . . Here Nels is safe. The Viking's Cave. Queen of the Snows. . . . But water? Food? And he is hurt! A doctor—he must have a doctor. I must get one. . . . But how? Think!"

"Sleep, beloved. . . . He is cold. I am cold. My eyes are drowsy. I must not sleep. Look at anything, look at the web, the sparkling spider's web, the shining web—I must be back at the house, back before the searching-party. They won't know I've been with Nels; they didn't see us. It was dark, confused; they wouldn't know. They can't know. They'd think he went alone. Then I will bring him everything—doctor, food, everything. Leave him?"

"No, dearest; I am here. Sleep."

"Leave him. . . . Must. . . . Wounded. Oh, Lord, how will we get out of this? There must be a way of escape. Maybe Rolf? Escape? An open boat? Patrols, watchers, mined waters. They'd kill us, kill us. . . .

"Nels dear, what, what?"

He had called her name. She felt the sweat on his forehead. A half-hour passed; his breathing became quiet. "Everything must be thought out, planned. But I must be home. Home before they're back. . . .

"Nels darling, are you awake? How are you, dear?"

"Better, Marya, don't worry." His voice was low; she could barely hear.

"Listen to me, dear: I have to leave. I must be home before morning, so they won't know I was with you. Then

I'll be able to bring you everything you need. Am I right? Is it best to go, Nels?"

"Yes, Marya, it is best."

"Oh, my darling—to leave you here!"

"No, Marya, I'm all right." He forced the words out slowly.

Marya readjusted his bandage and put the shreds of her mutilated veil under his head. She hovered over him a few minutes more, doing things that needed no doing.

In the dark, she could barely see the outlines of his face. With her fingers she felt that his eyes were closed. Stooping quickly, she kissed his mouth. "Bless you," she said, and was gone, leaving the shadowed goblins of the cave to guard him.

CHAPTER SEVEN



THE clouds hung low over the mountain; and the moon, gliding in front of them, cast flickering high lights, illuminating and

tinging the sea-crest with its half-light.

Marya had left the cave five minutes back. She had decided on the trail she would take to escape the patrol party that was combing mountain, forest and sea for them. She had little fear of being found, for she knew a hundred ways through this twisting mountain land.

Her attention was caught by a boat weaving into the shore, past the reef. . . . That was odd; for even from open sea you saw the breakers caused by rocks rising almost to surface height under the water and beyond them a small cove, whose end you could see clearly.

Yet this boat had woven its way sinuously through the reefs and was crossing the white water, heading into the cove.

Had they, after all, tracked her? Cut them off? Or was this just a general searching-party making ready to land? But so near the cave? Maybe they were not Germans, only fishermen. But why were they making for the cove?

She couldn't leave Nels now and go home—not until she had satisfied herself that they were not discovered!

Marya became a black shadow. Fused with the cliff, she slipped down along its precipitous sides. She climbed warily, testing each boulder with an advanced toe before trusting her weight to it. The dizzy drop ended in a mass of conical stones. She kept her eyes on a level, not daring to look down. It was ten minutes before she stood at the bottom of the rock-hemmed cove, merged with its deepest shading.

But there was no boat. Marya stood unbelieving: she had seen it; it had entered the cove. Yet there was the half-circle of shore a hundred yards ahead of her where the cove ended.

Silently she passed the spray-wet rocks. The waters lapped them hungrily. She had passed the horseshoe curve that a step back had seemed the end of the cove.

Only now, when she had rounded the rim of this bowl, could she see the small bottleneck inlet that held the boat. The sheer cliffs rose diagonally from the back, forming an awning of mountain five hundred feet above.

Marya pressed closer. The boat was moored to the rock, and beside it a tent was pitched—and a car parked!

The car must be carried on its deck, thought Marya. But why? What was the reason? Were they Germans?

In her absorption, she had come closer than she intended, and a muffled yet steady metallic clicking reached her. A man came out from the cabin. Marya started back.

There was something familiar about him—what was it? She peered intently, and edged her way forward.

She was fifteen yards from the boat, and now she recognized the man. Was it Hjalmar, the doctor's son, the crazy one? Why, he had been at her wedding two hours earlier!

A sudden movement from him, and a blinding light flashed in her face.

Two men ran toward her. With the light in her eyes, she couldn't see. There was a pounding in her ears, and for an unending moment she waited.

They reached her. The light was lowered. It was Hjalmar and another she had never seen.

"Marya Linde, what are you doing here?" cried Hjalmar.

She let them lead her to the boat. She was tired. The confusion, the excitement had gone, and left her unfeeling, numb. None of this was really happening, or if it was, somehow it didn't matter.

"Pour her some brandy." The other said that. The drink felt cold, but she swallowed it, and it became warm, spreading comfortably over her.

Marya looked with interest at the small cabin. Three-quarters of it was taken up by the control-board of a radio transmitter. There were three bullet-holes in the cabin wall, and two in the wireless set. A portable typewriter was set on the table. What a strange boat, with radios for fishnets and typewriters for fish!

Marya's captors were evidently at a loss to decide what to do with her. The younger one paced nervously. Marya watched him with amazement.

Hjalmar? Was this Hjalmar? She wasn't dreaming; this was the Hjalmar she had known before the war, not the village idiot. He walked firmly, spoke forcefully. Marya felt bewildered. Had he been shamming? Had he fooled the whole village? Was it possible?

She watched the other man for a clue.

Powerful and tawny, he seemed a tall Viking on his way to the sea. The auburn hair and beard were reflected as tiny points of red in his green-brown eyes. By his hard, tanned face and the lines seamed in it, she recognized a fisherman. She recalled his voice—low, but the tone commanded. She felt more afraid of him than of Hjalmar; but strangely, she trusted him more. He leaned with his back against the pillar, watching casually, missing nothing.

"Hjalmar," she said, turning to him, "I don't understand this. What has happened to you?"

"You should be answering questions, Marya, not asking them."

"Easy, Dial," the red one reprimanded.

"What does it mean, Hjalmar?" Marya repeated.

It whirled in her mind: Hjalmar fooling the village, pretending madness, this hide-away, the radio for sending messages. . . . To whom? The Gestapo?

A new thought was in Marya's head. She looked at Hjalmar closely. Was it fantastic, or was it possible? Could these be unconquered Norwegians? Fighting underground? That radio—were they the Freedom Senders? If they were, would they help—would they help Nels escape?

But if they weren't—if they were German agents—

Marya found herself staring moodily at the typewriter, counting the keys, mechanically, up from the period in the right hand corner. It was not until she had reached "t" in the top line, that her attention was caught by the wisp of paper, whose torn edge still stuck in the roller.

"Someone must have ripped it out, probably when they found me," she thought.

Bombarding Hjalmar with questions, she edged closer. At last she was able to read the small letters in a number of sidelong glances:

"... Complete German defeat in Crim . . ."

And on the next line:

"... EEDOM S - -"

Marya turned to the tawny giant and said arrogantly: "You are the Freedom Senders."

His expression did not change. "You have too much imagination," he said quietly.

"You are! Hjalmar, you are!" Marya cried defiantly.

"Well?" Hjalmar asked the other, who puffed steadily at his pipe as if in reply to an unspoken question. Marya turned to him too.

"You've got to help me," she said, and the words came tumbling over each other, as she told about Nels.

"Yes," interrupted the big man, nodding toward Hjalmar. "I heard about it from Dial. So he was wounded?"

"Yes. We need help," Marya replied.

Hjalmar assured the other man: "Marya is Marya Linde. I know her. She's all right. It was her brother we picked up that night. You remember. —And about us," he continued, turning to the girl, "why do you trust us? How do you know we aren't spies or Quislings?"

Marya pointed to the typewriter and laughed at their chagrin.

"Oh!" said Hjalmar. "Then what do you want us to do for your husband?"

"Help us escape to Scotland," she answered promptly.

"But how?"

"In this, your boat." To Marya it was simple, and she looked expectantly at the silent leader.

"Impossible," he said shortly, and she did not think of questioning his decision. "However," he added, "we will see that he has food and water." He interrupted her thanks: "It's close, it will be little trouble. Draw us a map of the hillside, locating that cave as precisely as you can."

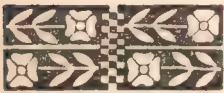
Obediently, Marya sat down at the table and sketched. She felt happy and confident. Supplying Nels with food was taken care of; the Viking's cave would never be found; and she had by no means given up the idea that these two would take them to Scotland.

"Dial, help her get to the road."

At the cabin door, Marya paused. "I don't know your name."

"Kristaver," the red one replied.

CHAPTER EIGHT



HE increasing light of dawn dissolved blurs and shadows. Home! Marya opened the door of her mother's house. There

was a slight movement in the room. Marya felt it more than saw it. She stood still taut, listening, fearing.

"Marya, is it you?"

"Oh, Mother!" Marya knelt down beside the rocker.

"It's all right, Mother."

"I knew you'd come. I waited. Marya, child, you're crying."

"No, Mother."

"Go up to bed now, dear. It's almost morning."

"Yes, I'm tired."

Mrs. Linde stooped and kissed her. "My married girl," she whispered.

Marya smiled. She crossed the room quickly and felt for the banister.

"Marya."

"Yes, Mother," she said, half turning.

"Thank God this night, daughter."

"I will, Mother. Good night."

She sat on the dressing-bench and laid her shoes neatly on the floor.

"My new shoes—my wedding shoes." And a tear fell onto the mud-covered toe.

"I must hide them—they may search the room."

Picking them up, she tucked them behind Eric the Red. She reached for the snap at the waist of her dress, but her fingers lingered, stroking the soft crêpe. It was torn in the skirt. She hid it in the bureau drawer. The petticoat was the last to come off. The rent in it reached midway from her thigh to her knee. She patted the petticoat gently as she stuffed that behind Eric, too. Then, climbing into bed with her sister, she thought of Nels.

"I wish he were here instead. Oh, I want to be with him." To absolve herself, Marya began her prayers.

"Dear God, please don't let him be hurt badly and make him miss me, and oh, God, thank you—"

She was interrupted by fingers groping over and tightening on her hand. She returned the squeeze. So Joanna wasn't asleep. Oh, if she could only tell her about Hjalmar! But she had sworn; and besides, Hjalmar was the one to tell her, when he could.

So the sisters lay in the four-poster bed. They lay quietly, holding each other's hands, waiting. Morning would bring the patrol. Already, the first light pressed through, covering the night with its pale tints. . . .

Boots on the stairs—a sharp rapping on their door.

"Yes," called Joanna.

"Open."

It was von Klemmer.

"A moment, please," said Joanna.

The girls got into their robes and Joanna went to the door while Marya sat up on the pillows.

Von Klemmer entered with a clipped: "Good morning."

How he enjoyed this, thought Marya, regarding the stout, pompous figure with contempt. She also felt a little afraid of those fish-blue eyes, which were fastened on hers.

He strode to the foot of the bed.

"Frau Anders," he said, and Marya thrilled at the title, even as she braced herself for the questioning.

"Your husband is wanted. He is in hiding. Where? I suggest that you communicate this information to me at once. Anders is guilty of assault, with intent to kill, a German officer."

"He didn't want to kill him."

"Nevertheless, the corporal is in a critical condition, suffering from concussion. He may or may not live. Let me make it clear: If any information as to the whereabouts of Nels Anders, paroled convict, is withheld by his relatives—well, we have all heard of the Gestapo. You are a sensible young lady, and I doubt if you would forfeit the lives of your mother, brother and sister here, for a husband of only a few hours."

"Major von Klemmer, as to where my husband may be, I know no more than you. I only hope that he is out of the country by now."

"Frau Anders, I shall question you at greater length later. I don't wish to be compelled to report your uncoöperation!" With a curt nod to Joanna, he stalked from the room.

"You shouldn't have answered him that way," said Joanna.

"He is a boor," Marya replied, and settled back on the pillows to think.

FROM a distance Dr. Halvorsen seemed more like a puppet on springs than a man. Marya called, "Dr. Halvorsen, Dr. Halvorsen," and would have run to catch up with him had she not recalled in time her new dignity. The doctor retraced his steps and Marya quickened hers.

"Good morning, Marya—er—Mrs. Anders, it should be now."

"I'm glad I saw you. I was just going to your office. Mother's ill," she added.

"I'll go right along with you then. What seems to be the trouble? She was right enough last night for the wedding."

"I guess it's last night that's upset her," Marya replied evasively.

"Probably an attack of nerves. A good tonic should fix her up." And the little man discussed the value of herb mixtures until they reached the outskirts of the village.

The doctor turned automatically into the side-street but Marya plucked his coat sleeve nervously.

"No, this way," she said, "farther up the road."

"What, she's not at home?" said the doctor in surprise, and he glanced sharply at Marya.

"No, she went to Mr. Svan's this morning, to bring some preserves. I was to meet her halfway just before lunch and

walk back with her but I walked all the way and when I got to Peter Svan's I found her lying on the couch. She was very pale and Mr. Svan said she had fainted."

"Hmm," said the doctor professionally. "Well, I wouldn't worry. Probably a belated nervous reaction. Last night was enough to upset anyone. That was a daring escape Nels made. I was proud of him."

"Yes," said Marya.

"Well, he's safe enough yet. We'd have heard if they found him. Or perhaps you have heard?" He looked quizzically at Marya. "Love finds a way, I've always said," and his little eyes twinkled.

"There's a shortcut here," said Marya, turning aside.

DR. HALVORSEN had an aversion to uncivilized vegetation but he stepped firmly on the tall grass. "A shortcut?" he panted, when they had walked ten minutes in the forest. "You call this a shortcut?"

"I'm sorry, Dr. Halvorsen, it's Nels. I was afraid you wouldn't come if I told you. He was wounded last night and—"

"Ha, ha," the doctor broke out, "a good joke, a good joke on me. Mr. Svan's house, a shortcut—oh, what a girl!" He seemed doubled up with mirth. "But my dear Marya, you could have counted on me without all this fol-de-rol."

"I was afraid, Doctor. After all, it's endangering you—and well, I wouldn't have done it at all if I hadn't been so worried."

"Tell me, where is he from here, how far?"

"Not far. I arranged for him to meet us at the end of the glade."

"If the boy is hurt you shouldn't have let him move."

"It seems to be only his shoulder, and I thought it better if you didn't know where he is hiding; then no one could force you to tell."

"True. The Gestapo are not kind to those with secrets. But tell me, how far is it from here to the meeting-place?"

"Only a few minutes."

"The reason I ask, I'm almost out of antiseptic. I doubt if I've enough to treat him. I could get it and be back in thirty minutes. Less, if I took the car to the end of town."

"No, no. I don't want Nels to make the trip twice. It is dangerous to keep him so long in the open. Just look at him and do what you can."

"It would be better if I had— Well, it shall be as you wish."

Marya was hardly listening. She had sent Rolf with a message. What if Rolf hadn't reached him, or if Nels were worse. If he was too ill to come to the valley, she would have to take the doctor to the cave. Or could she risk it?

Marya's head ached and buzzed.

But her fears were fantasy. There Nels was, propped against a boulder, waiting.

"Marya," he called, but drew back as he saw the doctor.

"Nels, it's all right, Nels. It's the doctor. How are you, my darling, how is your shoulder?"

Nels stroked her hair and held her.

Dr. Halvorsen beamed genially.

"A miraculous escape, Nels lad, simply miraculous. But let's have a look at this shoulder of yours!" And he bustled busily with his black bag and instruments.

"We'll just wash this out and have a look."

Marya's hands went cold as she watched the doctor shake alcohol into a wad of cotton. The bottle was full. Why did he say he had to go back for more? Could he have been mistaken or had he a reason for wanting to go back? God! What had she done? She heard herself ask quietly: "Is it bad, Doctor?"

"No, no, nothing serious, just a flesh-wound. The bullet passed through, grazing the shoulder, but did not lodge. You are very fortunate, my boy. Just keep it cleansed and it will heal nicely in ten days or so."

Nels thanked him and Marya said she would lead him back through the wood.

The doctor protested, saying he could find his way. But the girl insisted.

"Wait for me," she said to Nels, and made the doctor trudge two complete circles before leading him to the end of the forest.

Then she ran most of the way back.

"Nels darling, I've done a terrible thing. I suspect the doctor." And she poured out the story of the antiseptic in breathless words.

"But I did lead him a chase through the woods," she added.

Nels smiled, as he replied with rapid kisses on her eyes, her nose and her mouth.

"We can't stay here," said Marya, when she had caught her breath.

"At least we can climb back slowly. Rolf is still in the cave; and darling wife, I've hardly seen you."

"Oh, Nels, do you love me?" Suddenly she was tucked against him, crying. Nels, in his consternation held her as tightly as he could with one arm. He caressed her wet cheek with his own.

"Marya dear, Marya beloved," he whispered. "It's all right. Everything's all right—*sh-h-h!*"

"I know it's silly of me—when everything's over I cry. How stupid!" Her sobs redoubled.

"My brave darling, sweetheart, don't cry so. I love you, Marya. It's all right, all right." He rocked her gently back and forth, quieting her with his words.

She had stopped crying and still they stayed. He ran his fingers over her face and throat, memorizing each contour.

"We must go," she whispered.

"Yes," he said and kissed her. But neither moved.

CHAPTER NINE



IN their magnificent blue easel cloud-forms were stretched, taut and clean. Rolf lay on his back outside the Viking's Cave and

emptied his mind into the whiteness. He felt desolate as an old man. Whenever he closed his eyes he could see the flash of the gasoline tin, he could hear Sigurd's gasp, he could feel the water freezing his legs. Rolf remembered bitterly his helplessness in the hands of the two German soldiers the night of the wedding. True, he had tricked them, but he would have preferred to kill them. He would have liked to brain the corporal as Nels had done.

Indeed, Rolf reflected with intense disgust, these German corporals could stand several brainings. There was the man lying on the floor, his head cracked in three places; and, only an hour later when he was carried out, wrapped in ten yards of bandages, he was talking, demanding to be put down, cursing rationally, fluently, and continually in four languages. . . .

Marya and Nels were coming, love-talking. Soft stuff, Sigurd had said.

"Hello," Rolf called, to interrupt them.

"Rolf?"

"Yes, I've been waiting."

"Rolf, I'd better ask you at once. What do you think of Dr. Halvorsen?"

"Why? I don't like him."

Nels interrupted: "He smiles too damn' much."

Marya went on, "I didn't tell you, but I brought him up into the wood just now to look at Nels, and I caught him in a strange lie. I can't understand. He couldn't have forgotten. Why did he pretend he had to go back?" And she told Rolf what had happened.

Rolf remembered the doctor's dock, the map, the gas-tank—the Germans waiting.

"I don't know," he said aloud, "but I know you made a mistake even talking to that gull."

"WELL, what now?" Rolf demanded sharply. "He's not dead, is he?" Nels glanced up at Marya. "The German? No. Mother said he was talking when they took him out. Von Klemmer said it was concussion."

"They're out looking for you now, Nels, and have probably wired your description all over Norway," Rolf interrupted. "How long do you think you can hide here?"

Marya answered.

"He can—we will escape!"

Nels was silent. He tried to compose his face. A number of angry replies gathered in his throat. He wanted to say: "This is my problem, I will work it out, I will solve it, for God's sake leave me alone, do not push and pull and direct me. Things are not settled so easy. Escape? Where to? How? I know they're out looking for me. If Rolf would shut up for a second, I would be able to think. What I need is some rest. . . ."

"What a dirty wet day!" he burst out, rising and turning his back to the sea.

"We will try for Scotland." Marya waited for some reaction and then went on as if answering an objection, "Nels, you can join the army in exile. I will—I will become a nurse. Rolf, I think they will let you go to school again."

"What are you talking about?" Rolf was deeply offended by the word *school*. "What have I to do with this?"

Marya violently pulled out a clump of weeds and tore them up. "We will have to steal a boat. Rolf, you are a good pilot. Nels and I will learn."

"Where do we get gasoline? And food? Whose boat do we take and how?" Rolf objected.

"Oh, I don't know," said Marya unsteadily, "I can't understand you two. *You*,"—her eyes fixed Rolf,—"*object* and question and talk like an old woman. I don't know where we're going to get gas or food, I don't know how or when or what—all I know is that we *will*! Help me, don't cross-question me. And *you*,"—she turned to Nels,—"*you don't say a thing*." She sobbed.

"Oh, Marya!" her husband barked furiously. "Don't go off into those wild dreams. The man isn't dead."

"The man isn't dead," she mocked. "All right! They won't shoot you. They'll just put you back in the camp, and whip you twice a week. That'll be all right, won't it? Maybe you're waiting for the British to come over and rescue you."

"Well?" Rolf reinforced his sister. "You see!" he added in contempt when Nels made no reply.

"Rolf, go home." Nels controlled his voice with an effort. "Since it is decided that I escape," he continued sarcastically, "I will escape, but in my own way. I will make my way over the mountains to the north. Only a madman would try to cross that sea of mines in one of your little boats. I will wait till my shoulder is better, and then follow the coast ridge."

"I," repeated Marya brokenly.

Rolf walked off, and began to climb the crest.

"Well—" Marya began, and stopped.

"Marya, darling, I didn't mean it. You know that isn't so. What I meant—darling, listen to me," he began to make amends with the reluctant earnestness of a man who knows he is in the right. "I love you, my wife, my bride," he said over and over again.

She let him embrace her, and place pleading little kisses on her face and shoulders.

"I must have been crazy," he said. "You are right; we will escape." She began to cry. "What is it? Speak to me, darling."

"By boat?" she wept.

"By boat," he agreed, defeated.

She sprang up and ran out on a projecting boulder.

"Rolf!" she called. Her brother was at the top of the hill. "Good-by, Rolf. I will see you at home."

"Good-by, Marya," he called back, "it will be all right."

Marya returned to the Viking's Cave, smiling tenderly.

In Nels' deep exhausted sleep, visions of guns, of woods, of Marya, slowly gave way to pictures of eggs and bread and steaks. He heard a cry of "Food!" and awoke, fiercely hungry.

"Food!" The big red-bearded man who stood over Nels chuckled.

Marya awoke with a cry. "Oh, Nels!" She did not even notice the presence of the other man. Nels struggled to rise.

"It is all right," said the visitor, reading Nels' look. "I am delivering a package for Mrs. Anders."

"Kristaver!" she said, blinking sleep out of her eyes.

"This is her home, isn't it?" he said.

"Who are you?" said Nels, completely bewildered.

His wife replied gayly: "Kristaver, and he's bringing us water and food, I hope."

"Not good food, but plenty." The giant swung his knapsack. Bride and groom watched with famished eyes as he drew out their wedding breakfast. They ate in silence. Nels devoured; Marya pondered; Kristaver smoked.

As Nels' pace slowed, he found himself staring at the other man. He started to say, "Who—" but checked himself.

Marya had carefully planned her first sentence: "What else comes out of that magic knapsack, Kristaver? Is there oil or gasoline in its side pocket?"

"Marya, who is—I mean, let us introduce ourselves!" exclaimed Nels, startled into action. "I am Nels Anders. This is my wife."

"I am Kristaver." Turning to Marya, he added: "I could carry gasoline in this pack, if someone filled it at the German camp."

"Marya, what is— Look, Kristaver, you say you are Kristaver; but that doesn't tell me who you are."

"Nels darling, be quiet."

"Is he a friend of yours?"

"Of course," she said, "and yours too."

"You seem to be calling in the whole village for consultation!"

Kristaver laughed. His laugh was full and rumbling, and rolled around in him a long time before it came to the surface.

"I can't give you a better explanation, Mr. Anders. Like you, I once broke the head of a German officer."

"Oh, Nels, don't you understand? It's so simple. To escape, we need three things: a boat, gasoline and food."

"And luck," said Kristaver.

Nels did not trouble to answer.

"Good-by." Kristaver took up his knapsack and turned. "I think Marya had better get back home—and not spend too much time here."

"Thanks for the food. Good-by!" Nels replied angrily.

Marya followed the tall man. "This is Mrs. Anders' home," she said in gentle pride. "Think of something," she pleaded.

"All right." The pipe puffed. "Gasoline."

CHAPTER TEN



ACH person cut-out and shaped his own uneven actions, hardened his own irregular plans, and dropped a living stone in-

to the great mosaic framed by the North Sea and the Kiölen Mountains. Whether the pattern was jumble or design, they did not stop to consider. . . .

Dr. Halvorsen wet his nose in the evening grass, padding about like a dog. Among his accomplishments he counted skill as a tracker, and he waited only till evening before searching out the footprints of Nels and Marya. But skilled though he was, it was slow work; he ran his head into innumerable trees before he came out at last on the edge of the cliff and heard the fjord whispering below. Here on

the hard soil and rock the footprints gave out. The hiding-place could not be far, reasoned Halvorsen; the boy had been pretty weak this morning. It would take patience and care and intelligence, but thank God he had plenty of each; he'd search every foot of that cliff face, and he'd trap the badger. Nor would he get the slightest scent of his pursuer till the irons were on him. But at length the doctor looked at his short legs and globular stomach and groaned. Tomorrow, he decided, and walked wearily home in the twilight.

HJALMAR, slipping into the tent, found the chief sleeping. Pinned to the tent-flap, there was a note. Hjalmar removed it and read:

Dial:

Hang around German camp. Find where boat fuel is kept. Draw a map. Indicate wooded spots and sentries.

Kristaver

Food and clothing—those were Marya's problems. There was a sea-chest that had been her father's; it would do for the three of them. She packed as calmly as if she were still going by steamer to Trondhjem. All her former pictures of the future had faded, and now she lived each day in England or America, the wife of Nels Anders, combat pilot. The thought of the curling, terrible sea did not frighten her. Mines, planes, patrol boats, destroyers, she ignored.

Apathy like a net settled over Nels. His wound ached, throbbing monotonously. The watchful waters paralyzed him; he knew they were waiting for him, and the conviction that soon their salt hands would take him, destroyed all energy and hope. He felt bound: bound to Marya, tied and roped to the shore of the North Sea. . . .

Despite all Rolf's criticizing and carping, he was eager for new adventure. But they dared meet only once with the Freedom Senders. Kristaver assigned their tasks: "Marya—plenty of food and sweaters; Rolf—the boat; we'll get you gas."

Marya sent her brother to buy whatever heavy clothing he could get at the store. . . .

Mr. Ostergaard owned the fastest, sturdiest boat in the harbor. It was more of a launch than a fisherman's trawler. Ostergaard was quite angry with Rolf. "If your father were alive, it wouldn't be necessary for me to talk to you like this. But someone has to make you young rascals understand that there is a limit to wildness."

"I would like to buy a sweater."

"I have no sweaters. Let me see your clothing-card. . . . You realize that if you and Nels had been able to control your heroics, the tragedy might not have happened."

"Tragedy? All he did was to shake the yolk out of a German. . . . What about a wind-breaker?"

"No wind-breakers. You have enough left for a cotton jacket, but I don't know whether I ought to sell to your family. It's things like that that bring a bad name on us all." Mr. Ostergaard came out from behind the counter. "It all comes from association with good-for-nothings. You hung around with that Sigurd too much."

"What is this?" Rolf dug into a pile of clothing. "Sweaters!"

"They are reserved—bought. Now, pay attention. Many of us think those boys went off on a hike. Some believe they fled to England. I know they were caught—and shot! Understand?"

"Yes. I understand."

"Now I suppose you think that that is where the mischief ended. No! It seems they stole a boat in Ostraa. They stole this boat, and with the best of intentions, of course, they sent the owner an anonymous letter enclosing money for it. The owner does not dare let the matter rest, but reports immediately to the police, who take the money from him, and it was none too much in the first place. See now, other people begin to suffer."

"I see the sweater," Rolf replied with determination.

"Don't be smart. I'm telling you this for a purpose. I want to warn you that this town at least has had enough of escapades. I want to warn you, and through you, I want to warn Nels Anders."

"If these boys had taken *your* boat, what would you consider a fair price?"

"Who mentioned my boat?" Ostergaard cried in fury. "A hundred and fifty dollars?" asked Rolf simply.

"You little devil! If your father were alive, I would ask him to beat you. It is worth three hundred at least, and I am putting a lock on it tonight."

"I think one hundred and seventy is the most you would have a right to."

"I'm going to throw you out of here!" But though Mr. Ostergaard continued to refer to Rolf as "little," he easily saw that the youth towered over his own bulk, and made his threats without advancing an inch.

"If you are planning anything, I think it is my duty—" Ostergaard began again.

"All I am planning is how to get a sweater, Mr. Quisling." The storekeeper looked extremely hurt. Rolf continued: "We always had our eye on you, Sigurd and I."

"You misunderstand me," the fat man shouted. "I am no—that is, I am a Norwegian."

He stopped, and his eyes filled with pain and annoyance. He had noticed Peter Svan standing in the doorway.

"You mentioned Sigurd," the old man said politely to Rolf; "have you heard from him?"

"No!"

Rolf's voice whipped sweat across the storekeeper's brow. "But maybe *he* has. Tell him, Mr. Ostergaard, about the 'owner who does not dare let the matter rest'—probably your brother, or at most your cousin. Tell him how they trapped his grandson and shot him. Tell him how you trade with the Germans and help them break their own dirty laws, while *your* son's body rots in Namsos. Tell him about that traitor Martin Kanelsen of Ostraa, who was found in the gutter with sixteen knives in him. Tell him, as you told me, 'how other people begin to suffer!'"

OSTERGAARD became paler and at the same time greener, till his face resembled stale cheese. He could stand Rolf's accusation, but the stern red eye of the old fisherman took the sap out of his legs. He sat down, muttering that he was misunderstood.

"Speak up!" ordered Svan. "Has any harm come to my grandson? What do you know?"

"I know nothing. He is dead. He must be."

"And so will everybody else be who talks to German slaves."

"For the Lord's sake, Rolf, don't talk like that," moaned Ostergaard, weeping. "Your life is as precious to me as my own son's. Your father and I grew up together; he was my only friend. When he died, I would speak to no one for six days!" He turned to Svan for confirmation.

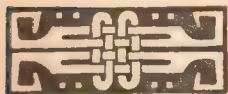
"Stop this nonsense and tell us about Sigurd!"

Ostergaard appealed helplessly to Rolf: "Can't you make him understand about the boy? Rolf, I beg you—not for the world would I have you believe that I am one of the Hird. . . . I am forced; after all, the Germans are in control here; mine is the only store; I cannot—" He broke off, and after some unintelligible floundering, continued: "You know my son died to save Norway. I will help you, Rolf. I do not know what you want to do or who are your friends. But don't class me with traitors. Don't mention that Kanelsen. For God's sake, I have some feeling. If those fanatic Freedom Senders—I swear to you I am a loyal Norwegian—"

Neither Rolf nor Svan moved. Ostergaard continued to writhe. "I will help you get a boat—I am a patriot," the fat man moaned. "I want to help Norway. Take the boat, in God's name, it is all I have—my only possession; the Germans have taken everything. Only for a fellow-countryman, a patriot, make it two hundred dollars. And be careful it does not look like money in the mail."

"I do not know what you are talking about," said Rolf coldly. "Don't shout, or the sentry will hear you. . . . Come, Mr. Svan." He led the old man out.

CHAPTER ELEVEN



NE night a sudden inexplicable fire erased the picture of German order and discipline at their encampment on the fjord.

According to the report dictated by Herr von Klemmer:

The only one observed at the scene of the fire was the village idiot, a certain Hjalmar Halvorsen, who has since been questioned with no results. Our first thought was that the act was one of wanton malice, for while the fire destroyed a large wood to the north of our camp, it did not menace any part of the camp itself. However, certain of our sentries who were on duty at the boathouses were attracted by the fire, and in their culpable enthusiasm ran to help. Steps have been taken to bring their guilt home to them.

What made us believe that the fire was merely part of a larger plan was that at the time when most of our men were engaged in putting it out and guarding against its spread to the tents and supply houses, a small car containing two or three men, it is estimated, came down the road to the boathouse. The sentries were off guard, and five of them were shot. The marksmanship of the raiders, who are no ordinary bandits, is testified to by the death of all five.

These men then exploded the corner of the boathouse, an extremely risky procedure which started an oil fire. However, they had run their car down the road to the beach, and now the fire was between us and them. There were two more guards among the boats, and we could hear them putting up a resistance which, we later found out, was completely unsuccessful. The raging, exploding oil fire completely prevented our going to their aid by land, and I immediately gave orders for the patrol boat (which was docked at a pier half a mile from the cove in which the torpedo boats were harbored) to cut them off.

In the meantime, in a manner not yet clear to me, the raiders had dismantled their tiny truck and stowed it on one of our torpedo boats, which is by orders kept fueled for the trip across the North Sea. They shot out into the fjord, and our patrol boat gave chase. They fired on us with our own guns, and in the exchange of shots both boats were severely damaged.

Our other patrol launch was now in the water, but a low fog prevented them from finding the raiders. They escaped, but from the erratic motion of their ship when last seen, it could not have lasted more than a few miles. In the morning our entire squadron scoured the fjord, but no trace was found.

It is my belief that these men were identical with the Freedom Senders, and the collapsible car explains their escape the other time. I am taking every measure to trap them, and I have no doubt I shall be able to report success.

A full report on the extent and amount of the damage will follow. I would respectfully point out that this would not have happened had we been supplied with sufficient protective equipment, in particular concrete block-houses.

"Now damn you, Schultz," the Major concluded, "put that into official language and send it off. I am going to have another look at this black cursed fjord with its twenty-seven million inlets."

A somewhat shorter report was brought to Marya by her grease-soaked brother:

Marya—nearly got you both boat and gas. Put the kid to bed and burn his clothes. You must leave day after tomorrow in the morning in Oster's boat, before they take up Norway stone and root to find us.

—Kristaver.

The row of cottages stood out from the street in the half light like a bas-relief. Rolf passed Ingrid's house the second time. He had never called at her home before. He had only walked with her as far as the gate.

He stood in front of it now, and remembered he had kissed her twice in the hall at the wedding, and once on the porch. This gave him courage to walk up the path and ring the bell.

The door was opened by a plump woman in an apron.

"Why, Rolf Lindel!" exclaimed Mrs. Pederson. "What a surprise! Come in, do."

He had hoped Ingrid would answer the door. Mrs. Pederson led him into the living-room, where Mr. Pederson sat smoking and reading.

Rolf looked in desperation for Ingrid. She wasn't there. "Glad to see you, Rolf," muttered Mr. Pederson from the corner, going back to his paper. "Sit down, won't you?"

Mrs. Pederson was seating herself for an evening's chat. "I can only stay a minute. I—er—wonder, is Ingrid here? I have to see her about something," he finished lamely.

"What could this important something be, Mr. Linde?" laughed Ingrid. She had stolen up behind him from the kitchen, and was drying her sudsy fingers on her dress.

"Just got through dishes," she explained, plunging herself down on the nearest chair.

This wasn't Rolf's idea of a dramatic good-by. He should at least be able to have Ingrid alone, maybe kiss her again.

While he tossed about in his mind for a way of escape, Ingrid came to his aid.

"It's so warm tonight. You wouldn't mind if we went for a walk, would you, Mother?"

ROLF beamed his gratitude. Such a simple device! Why hadn't he thought of it? The door closed, and they stood facing the night.

"Ingrid, let's just stay here, sit on the steps maybe."

"All right."

"This is like the night of the wedding, sitting on the steps, remember?"

"I don't want to remember that night. It was terrible. I never was so frightened."

Her hand was conveniently near, and he slipped his own over it.

"Ingrid—" he said, and words came crowding up. He wanted to tell her he was going—wanted to tell her of the feeling in his stomach, a nausea, when he thought of that other attempt. It was always with him; and when he thought of tomorrow, he heard the guns, felt the numbing water; and his hand, covering Ingrid's, was cold.

"What is it, Rolf? You're so strange tonight. You start to say something, and then stop and don't say it."

"I'm sorry, Ingrid; I was thinking that I won't see you again this summer."

"Why?" she asked gravely.

"I'm going to spend the rest of the summer with Mother's people in Rissen."

"Oh!"

"I'll miss you, Ingrid. Will you?"

"Will I what?"

"You know what I mean," snapped Rolf.

"Well, you don't have to be so mean."

"Oh, Ingrid, I didn't mean to be. I want to kiss you. May I?" And without waiting for an answer, he lifted her face and kissed her.

Ingrid was made uneasy by this kiss. She wanted to hold this boy, hold him against all things. But instead, she pushed him back.

"That's enough, Rolf Linde. Do you want to smother me?"

"Ingrid," called Mrs. Pederson, "it's getting cold, dear. Hadn't you better come in?"

"Yes, Mother, in a minute." And then to Rolf she said:

"Well, have a good vacation, Rolf. Good night, now."

"Good-by—Ingrid, I want to kiss you again." He did. "I love you," he whispered fiercely. "Remember that, Ingrid. I love you." In three strides he was past the gate, but he didn't stop until the house was out of sight. It was only then that he brushed a rough hand across his eyes. He hoped she hadn't noticed. . . .

Dusk spread over the sea and settled outside the window. Nevertheless, Mrs. Linde continued looking out of it with the same fixity. She sat quietly; the only movement was that of her fingers busy with a skein of yarn.

"Can I bring you anything from the kitchen, Mother?"

At another time Mrs. Linde would have smiled at her daughter's solicitude. Now she bent more closely over her work.

"No, thank you, dear," she replied.

The two girls came in from their dishes. Joanna reached for a book, and Marya seated herself on the footstool by her mother.

"Where did Rolf disappear?" asked Mrs. Linde.

"Probably he's at Ingrid's," laughed Marya.

"Well, I approve," put in Joanna, over the top of her book. "He is old enough to take an interest in girls, and Ingrid's sweet."

There was a moment's silence.

"What are you working on, Mother?"

"A sweater for Rolf. It's almost finished."

"Yes," said Marya. Poor Mother, she thought. How awful it would be for her, not knowing. And yet she'd understand they had to. But how awful for her!

Marya couldn't look at her mother. Now that she was married, she felt as though she had shared the seasonal vigils of the fisherman's wife who waited through long months for a husband she knew would some day not sail back. But Anna Linde had little time to dwell on that, with three children in the house. Mending, washing, ironing, getting the meals, keeping the house, occupied her days. She enjoyed the chatter of her children, their problems, their jokes, even their quarrels. At night the family would gather in the living-room, busy with their separate work. At bedtime Mrs. Linde would read for half an hour from the Bible. This had been her life, and she was content.

Since the war, all had changed. The children no longer confided in her or in each other. They came and went at erratic hours. It had been long since they spent an evening together. They spoke less; and when they did, it was with bitterness and words of hate. Mrs. Linde had been afraid to read the Bible to them, and they did not ask her.

NOW the door banged, and the three women started. "Mother!" yelled Rolf; then, seeing his sisters, "Why are you all sitting in the dark?" he said energetically, turning on all the lights.

"I wouldn't turn them up now," his mother replied gently; "it's almost time for bed."

"Mother," said Marya, "couldn't we read from the Bible the way we used to?"

"Yes, dear. Of course, if you'd like. Would you fetch it for me, Rolf?"

The boy laid the book in her lap. Mrs. Linde looked at her three children, a prayer in her heart. She opened the book and read:

"And Judah said unto Israel his father, 'Send the lad with me, and we will arise and go; that we may live, and not die, both we, and thou and also our little ones. I shall be surety for him; of my hand shalt thou require him. If I bring him not unto thee, and set him before thee, then let me bear the blame forever: for except we had lingered, surely now we had returned this second time.'

"And their father Israel said unto them, 'If it must be so now, do this: take of the best fruits in the land in your vessels, and carry down the man a present, a little balm and a little honey, spices, and myrrh, nuts, and almonds. And take double money in your hand; and the money that was brought again in the mouth of your sacks, carry it again in

your hand; per-adventure it was an oversight. Take also your brother and arise, go again unto the man and God Almighty give your mercy before the man, that he may send away your other brother, and Benjamin. If I be bereaved of my children, I am bereaved.'"

Mrs. Linde read to the end of the story of Joseph. When she finished, there was quiet. Each seemed loath to speak or move.

"Well," said Joanna, "I'm tired. Good night, Mother; good night, Rolf. And you'll come up soon, Marya—will you?"

"Yes, in a minute. Good night, Mother," she said reservedly, but she hugged her close.

"Good night, dear." Mrs. Linde patted her hand. Marya turned away quickly.

"Good night, Mother," she called again from the stairs. Rolf, too, placed a quick kiss on her cheek, and called his good night from across the room.

Mrs. Linde rocked back and forth. Her fingers were quiet now. The sweater was finished.

CHAPTER TWELVE



HE black tide of night had rolled in. Its somber hues repainted the brightness of the village. Hjalmar slouched in the wind-

ow-seat, watching the spots of light in the windows along the street.

Dr. Halvorsen entered his study, briskly lit the lamp and started perceptibly at seeing his son, for they seldom met.

Dr. Halvorsen's squeamishness did not permit him to eat meals with Hjalmar. Mrs. Suzansa, who cleaned the house during the day, was instructed to feed him in the kitchen. The idiot seemed to sense his father's disgust, for he avoided him as much as possible, keeping to his room or wandering aimlessly through town and forest.

Since the fire, however, Dr. Halvorsen's distaste had grown to hate. He looked at the boy, saw his tall, well-made body and at the same time the hanging jaw and quivering hands.

What a ghastly trick had been played on him! This son whom he had nurtured, whom he had watched develop strength, beauty and stature, this boy in whom lay his name, his pride, his future—a madman! Halvorsen's rage mounted within his rotund body.

"Hjalmar," ejaculated the doctor; and mastering his aversion, he crossed the room and shook the boy from his stupor. Hjalmar looked up sulkily before his gaze wandered to the window.

"Stop staring into nothing, and pay attention when I speak to you."

The boy turned back wearily, passing a futile hand over his forehead.

"I received a bad report of you." And as the boy looked back his incomprehension, the doctor bellowed; "Do you understand, you fool, a bad report from von Klemmer."

Hjalmar made a move to escape, but all his gestures were languid, and he sank back listlessly.

"I'm tired," he said.

"Tired or not, you'll hear what I have to say."

"Why can't you leave me alone?"

"After the fire near the German encampment, when you were questioned, you were reported uncoöperative. Do you understand what I'm saying, you driveling idiot? 'Muttering and incoherent' the report said. From now on you won't go about town parading my disgrace. You'll be locked in your room. Do you understand that, moron?"

The boy huddled against the window. Tremors shook his body.

"You,"—his father's voice rose in derision,—"look at yourself! Your athlete's body, your wide shoulders, slim waist,

powerful arms, a superman from the neck down. The kind of a man for our new Norway, a leader! Then notice the head: a fine mop of hair, good nose, straight. But the eyes— Oh, something's wrong. They stare; they're empty; and the mouth—open, slobbering! A pretty son, a Halvorsen, one to make his father proud! You—"

THE staccato pitch of the doctor's words was broken off by a knock at the door. Dr. Halvorsen turned abruptly and jogged into the hall.

"Good evening, Doctor."

Hjalmar recognized the broad accent of von Klemmer, before he was in the room.

What could he want? Had they discovered anything? Was he here to search the house? Hjalmar dug his hands into his pockets; his fingers closed around his lucky piece.

"Come in, Major, come in," the doctor said cordially.

"Sorry I couldn't be here sooner."

Hjalmar's thoughts raced in confusion. What was this? Had von Klemmer been expected? What did it mean?

"What has turned up?" The Major cut himself short at the sight of Hjalmar, who was inanely tossing a coin into the air and catching it.

"What the devil!" he exclaimed angrily.

"It's just Hjalmar."

"I don't like the damn' imbecile around."

The doctor stiffened. He answered shortly that he had intended locking Hjalmar in his room.

"I'll assist you. So you lock him up at night? Like a zoo? Ja."

Hjalmar walked between them. The stairs leading to the garret room were narrow, and they went in single file, the doctor leading, Hjalmar in the middle tossing his coin.

Von Klemmer—von Klemmer and his father—what was the connection? Damn it, he'd dropped the lucky piece. He stooped for it, but the heavy foot of von Klemmer came down on it squarely. Hjalmar looked at the Major.

"My coin," he whimpered.

"Take it." The boot moved aside. The boy grasped for it but was not quick enough. The nailed shoes crushed deliberately on his fingers. Von Klemmer laughed.

"Well, pick it up, you idiot."

Hjalmar withdrew his hand, put the coin in his jacket pocket and nursed the bruised fingers with his other hand. He said nothing. He was shoved into his room and the door locked behind him.

"Well, what is your news?" von Klemmer demanded as he followed the doctor downstairs.

"A glass of wine, first, Major," Halvorsen insisted, leading the way to the table. He seated himself in the window-seat, his guest opposite, and uncorked the bottle that stood in readiness.

Above them, Hjalmar paced in torment.

He was amazed and perturbed that his father was on such sociable terms with von Klemmer. "I have to know what this all adds up to," he thought.

Cut in the roof of the garret was the small square of his window. From there the shingles curved down to the first story.

Hjalmar let himself out on the roof, and gripping carefully with feet and hands, made his way to the edge, just above the study window. He stopped, irresolute. But his father's voice, drifting out, decided him. He dropped flat and lay along the drain-pipe.

The conversation from the open window below was easily overheard.

"As I say," Halvorsen's voice rumbled up, "this Marya Anders knew from the beginning. She was the one who hijacked me in the first place. She took me into a valley which ended in a mountain bluff along the rear and left side. On the right small hills dwindled off into forests."

"Yes, yes. But the cave, where is that?"

"I'm coming to that." The fat man was undisturbed. "At the end of this glade Anders met us. He had a flesh-

wound in his shoulder, nothing serious. But he was weak from loss of blood, plainly incapable of traveling far. So I reasoned, and rightly as it turned out, that the hide-out was near this spot. I found my way back easily enough, and for several days scoured the neighborhood for footprints, broken foliage and other clues."

"Why the devil didn't you notify me of all this? That was the time to have blackened the place with the S. S. You have exceeded your authority, Dr. Halvorsen."

"But Major, I'd like to point out respectfully that it was *that* I wanted to avoid. To hunt in someone else's backyard is bad. Likewise to surround forest, shore and mountain is bad, when you are not familiar with it and the enemy are. A hue and cry would send them scuttling along the fjord, and it would take months to ferret them out. This way I did not bother you until the crucial time and—"

"And received the lion's share of credit." The Major laughed sourly.

"Not so, dear von Klemmer. It remains for you and the troopers to discover them. It is you who make out the reports, and I confess I have no desire to appear in them. It is enough if you find my services useful."

"I see. Well, continue, Doctor."

"It was the second day of my search. I had traced footprints to the left cliff, and from certain broken vegetation I assumed they were somewhere on top of this plateau, which stretches along for miles. Its width, however, is cut by a sheer drop of perhaps a thousand feet, where the sea batters against it. I had inspected this and had started down, when I heard a crisp noise as though twigs or bushes were snapped. I peered over the top of this incline, and was astounded to see Nels Anders not fifty feet from me. He seemed to have sprung from the mountain-side. He walked around a bit, and then, going back, followed a low gully, pushed aside some bushes that seemed to grow from the solid rock face, and disappeared. I crawled as close as I dared, and discovered the brambles concealed the entrance to a cave. I then noted landmarks and made report of these investigations to you, Major."

"Excellent, Doctor, excellent. We will surround this cave at daybreak. I will meet you a hundred paces in the forest directly behind Svan's place, and you will conduct us. Be there by five-thirty."

"Yes sir."

"And Doctor, in view of your other work—I'm referring of course to the example we were able to make of those boys who attempted desertion in a stolen boat—I will recommend you to Headquarters personally."

Oh, God, no—not that! Hjalmar felt sick, and a dull nausea spread through his stomach. He lay limp, heavy with disgust. The scraping of chairs roused him, and he climbed back the way he had come.

DR. HALVORSEN showed his guest out. "By the way," he said, as they reached the door, "I found this outside the cave." And from his pocket he extracted a much-used pipe-cleaner.

"Notice the print on it—Oslo, is it not? Made in Oslo."

"So?"

"Around this I have built a theory. It is clear that someone supplied food, water and other necessities to Anders. And according to this," he twirled the cleaner in his hand—"that person was a man. Anders himself does not smoke. And where would a fisherman come by a town pipe-cleaner? Especially a town as far away as Oslo?"

As the Major offered no solution, Halvorsen explained triumphantly: "Is it not likely that the Freedom Senders are aiding them, and that this was dropped by one of them? For certainly Marya doesn't smoke pipes."

"Hmm," said the Major, "an interesting speculation. Of course all these people are in cahoots. It may well be."

"I think it's possible we may catch a bigger prize than Nels Anders."

"What you've told me is most interesting, Doctor. We shall see. Well, tomorrow, five-thirty."

"I'll be there. Good night, Major."

On his way up to bed, Dr. Halvorsen opened the door to his son's room. Hjalmar lay rigid on the bed. In the German State such obscene examples of mankind would not be permitted to survive, thought Halvorsen as he banged the door.

HJALMAR traced a cross of thankfulness in the window dust before he tapped. He was standing on the Lindes' long shaky ladder, looking into the attic that was Rolf's bedroom.

Rolf was sleeping lightly, almost expectantly, and at the noise he started up. Hjalmar tapped again and pressed his face to the pane. The boy ran to the window and let him in.

"It's dark."

"It's only midnight," explained Hjalmar.

"Why? I mean—wasn't four in the morning the time?"

"I'll tell you later. Let's get out of here in a hurry."

Nodding uncomprehendingly, Rolf slipped into his sisters' room. He kept his eye on Joanna, and every time she stirred he stiffened in place. Small chirping squeaks followed him across the room.

"Marya," he whispered, "Marya." She awoke at once.

"All ready?"

"Shhh—dress—"

"Is this the chest?" Hjalmar asked as they came back into Rolf's room.

"Yes."

"It's pretty big," he said with an ironic smile. "We're not going on a cruise."

"All right," Rolf said, "let us take the chest."

They tied a rope around the chest, and their tense hasty fingers trembled.

"I'll lower it, Rolf. You guide it down." He took off his lumber-jacket and tied its arms around his waist. Rolf went down the ladder with the box on his shoulder while Hjalmar paid out the rope.

"Careful," said Marya, coming into the room, struggling with the clasp of her dress.

She heard a clink and whirled round, but there was nothing. The night was dark and empty. The faintest of crescent moons hung on the top branch of a fir.

"Keep off the road as much as possible," Hjalmar directed, as they walked along.

Marya turned back for a moment. She saw her mother's house, old, brown, standing squarely. She blessed the windows and the door. Farewell. . . .

They halted at the main street of the silent sleeping village. Crossing this was their gravest risk. On the other side were the docks. Just twenty yards down was Ostergaard's pier opposite the store and fifty yards past that was a German sentry strutting stiffly in the faint moonlight.

"It's an old trick, but that German is not the brightest of the crew," Hjalmar said. "I'll cut up behind the store and throw a rock into the bushes."

"If you can reach it," smiled Rolf, estimating the distance of the clump of evergreens that decorated Tonetsen's house at the end of the street.

"When you hear the crash, you and Marya take the chest across and into the boat. I'll amuse the sentry long enough to let you get out. If only we could have waited till that moon ducked lower! Pick me up about a hundred yards past Tonetsen's dock."

Brother and sister waited quietly. Both stared at the chest and did not lift their eyes. Sleep and sadness took the edge off the choking suspense *Crash!* There was the breaking, crackling sound. They saw the sentry turn and walk doubtfully toward the trees.

"Now!" They lifted, ran. The straps cut into Marya's hand. Her arm-socket felt as if it would come apart. Her breath began to come short and forced. They ran faster.

The sentry halted cautiously at the copse. He did not want to summon help—the noise was so little. He did not like to go in—the noise was so big.

Marya thought she would choke. For one second she hated the chest and every beloved thing in it. Then they were on the pier. Their feet made weak hollow sounds on the wood. The sentry wavered. More snapping from the trees. This was different. There might be someone in there. The soldier gripped his gun firmly and defiantly and stepped back.

Rolf and Marya put the chest into Ostergaard's boat. Rolf clapped the handsome launch on the gunwale. It was the salute of one Northman to another. There was a splash as the chest rocked the boat. The sentry turned around. He could not see the waterfront. "*Teufel!*" he grumbled. The night was annoying. So many un-right sounds, and yet nothing definitely wrong. Maybe it was his ears. He wouldn't blow an alert again and have von Klemmer blast his ears off for waking him up. Another noise. Just rats—Norway was full of rats.

"The boat is chained to the dock and locked," Marya said in an anguished whisper.

Rolf drew out a key and waved it with a flourish. "Ostergaard left it on the counter one day. A patriotic accident. He is Norwegian too."

The launch floated out of the slip gently and quietly, like a carven cake of soap. Rolf sculled with an oar. . . .

The sentry hesitated. Perhaps he should circle the trees and investigate No, it wasn't dark enough. He would be a target in the slight spark of moonlight that flickered across the path. Should he go down to the water and check up on those invisible boats? No. He shook his head. It was too dark.

"Watch for Hjalmar," Rolf said. He steered the boat close to the shore. They were about seventy yards past the row of docks that terminated in Tonetsen's pier. They heard Hjalmar in the water, croaking like a frog.

"Up now!" Rolf pulled their wet guide into the boat.

"I swam out. There are a lot of rocks in there. Better steer out sharp now."

"Where's your jacket?" asked Marya.

"Couldn't swim with it. It's under the fjord."

IT was half an hour before they decided to risk starting the motor. Hjalmar, his hands in his pockets, sat with shoulders hunched, a statue of dejection.

"Is anything wrong, Hjalmar?" Marya said.

"My lumber-jacket—my lucky coin was in it," he replied.

"Here," said Rolf when he heard the roar of the breakers, "we're at the rocks. You take it."

"Can it be possible to find the channel in the dark?" Marya exclaimed, as the boat bore down on the quarreling waters.

Starlight is a pale glow, the lightest of blues. In it the shaded shore fuses into the deep purple scoring of the fjord's edge. Points and coves are softened into slow deceptive curves. But out in the water all is foaming, roaring, splashing, streaking, boiling, whirling, and the blunt powerful rocks lower their heads and toss the waves. Whirlpools form between the boulders, and here and there a submerged rock is indicated by a white crest. But Hjalmar had brought a boat in on even denser nights.

He guided by a tall stone that stood like a pillar, by a burnt-out spot on the hillside, by the fold of shore-line that hid the cove, by the warning sound of the race as it tore through the small stones, by a stripped pine, by the feel of the water against the tiller, by the map of the channel in his head. Into the bay they came, and turned triumphantly up the hidden inlet that sheltered the Freedom Senders.

The outlaws' own launch was secured under the overhanging bushes. The German torpedo boat had been drawn partly up the sloping part of the bank, and the job of covering it with leaves and shrubbery had been nearly completed.

Kristaver stood quietly by the tent, as if he had been watching for them all evening.

"Ostergaard's ship?" he asked, smiling as he tied it up.

"Why, we have a navy here," said Rolf, and began to laugh. The irritating weight of suspense and inaction had rolled away. He proudly indicated the little flotilla: Ostergaard's motorboat, clean, unused, brightly painted; the German torpedo boat, slender and deadly; and the strange launch that the Freedom Senders used, with its oversize afterdeck, built to accommodate their miniature truck.

"We must climb up to Nels. Will you come with me?" Marya asked Kristaver.

Her brother objected. "That doesn't look like an easy climb at night. I'll go with him."

"In five minutes," Kristaver said, and taking Hjalmar's arm, he drew him into the tent. "What has happened? You are early."

"By accident I have discovered a traitor and—murderer in our town," Hjalmar replied in a flat voice. "He has discovered Anders' hiding-place. He is responsible for the death of Sigurd Svan and his friends. He is an agent of von Klemmer's. What else he may have done, I don't know." Hjalmar stopped. He stood stooped, his eyes dull, looking into themselves. "I have thought this over carefully. I considered reasoning with the man. He is intelligent, able, and in general good-hearted." Creases of pain marked Hjalmar's forehead. "I rejected this. He is untrustworthy and doped with Germanism. I considered killing this man myself." He paused. "I rejected this. . . . I have decided that we must announce the traitor's name in our next broadcast. We will let his country judge him. The man's name is Halvorsen. He is my father."

"Who else knows where Anders is?"

"Von Klemmer will raid it in the morning. He was with him."

"And this? Our cove?"

"No, I am sure they know nothing. He couldn't have resisted telling Von Klemmer that too."

"All right. We will sink the German boat, and dress ours with branches. They won't find us."

Hjalmar sobbed once harshly. "My father—"

"Yes?"

"He will be killed. Can't we warn him?"

"Get to work," the chief said.

"He's my—"

"Load the gasoline onto the Ostergaard boat. Let Rolf help. I will get Anders. Step, now!" Kristaver urged Halvorsen gently out of the tent.

"I am coming," Marya said. "I climb like a man."

"Better," said Rolf; "she climbs like a young goat."

Hjalmar was pulling tins of gasoline out of the torpedo boat. Rolf turned pale.

"What is it?" Marya shook her brother, frightened.

"Once before we went somewhere for gas. We never got out!"

Hjalmar lifted the tins slowly, with terrible restraint. . . .

Marya and Kristaver found Nels struggling with a nightmare. His open lips were dry and cracked. He had cushioned his sore shoulder with a pile of leaves rolled up in his jacket. He was covered by a coat of Kristaver's.

Kristaver gave Marya his flashlight and went out of the cave. He walked out into the cool air, and after much reflection, lit his pipe.

Marya knelt beside her husband, loath to wake him. She knew how he hated and feared the sea; she could understand that powerful unreasoned emotion, for in the close cave she began to feel a gradual penetrating settling of fear like an evil dew. Mountains, waves and storms she gloried in; but in this dark rock chamber she felt helpless and trapped. Home was gone. Mother and sister—good-by, perhaps forever.

She stroked Nels gently, and murmured nonsense melodies. She brushed his cheeks and lips with feathery kisses.

"It's time, darling," she whispered.

"Yes," he said sleepily. Time, time, time, rolled around in his mind, a stray word, devoid of meaning, knocking against the closed doors of memory. "Marya!" He gripped her and threw himself into a blinding kiss, driving that hollow word from his head. But it came back: time, time. Time for him to feel cold, time for his eyes to burn with fever, for his shoulder to throb, time for the cold blue fjord to creep up on him, time to go, to sail, to sink, to drown. . . . "Yes, it's time." And he let her kiss his weary passive lips.

Descending the hill, Nels felt better. It revived him to dig his feet into the earth. But when they reached the bottom, he felt sick and exhausted. The rest went maddeningly slow: getting into the boat, checking on the gas, making him comfortable in the cabin bunk, which seemed like an unusually large coffin, then bouncing out over rough water through the rocks, putting in again to shore to let their pilot Hjalmar off, and finally—out to sea.

"Here we go," Nels called out to Rolf in as cheerful a voice as he could summon, and then concentrated his energies on fighting down that uneasy rumble in his stomach.

Marya crept into the low cabin, and stroked his head. The calves of her legs ached, and her right hand was stiff. She discovered that she had kept it clenched in a fist for the whole of that last tense half-hour.

Ostergaard's boat pushed smoothly through the water. Rolf and Hjalmar had painted it a dirty gray-green. She and Nels had watched them finish the job. She had wanted to ask them to leave the adventurous brightness of the original coloring.

Marya opened the chest. On top was Eric the Red, wrapped in a handkerchief. She set him at the head of her bunk.

"Good-by," Kristaver had said, almost carelessly. "Good luck!"

"I want to—" she had begun. "You are—" And then, "Good luck to you." That was all.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN



NAZI fist pumping groans from the front door shattered the sleep of Mrs. Linde; the violent pounding sounded through the

cottage, and Joanna flung an arm over to Marya's side, touching only empty covers.

The girl stirred uneasily. Mrs. Linde fastened her wrapper as she hurried downstairs. She opened the door, and a company of Storm Troopers elbowed her aside and marched upstairs.

A swift search through the three upper rooms ensued. But when they saw the culprits had eluded them, their rage turned upon the inanimate objects at hand. The soldiers began doggedly wrecking the house.

"If you could tell me what it is you want," ventured Mrs. Linde, as she saw her best curtains ripped by three swift strokes of a bayonet.

Von Klemmer turned on her. "So, your son was in on this tool. What do you know of it?"

"Nothing. I know nothing."

The clatter of wrecking and tearing gave way, and Mrs. Linde was aware only of red veins lacing his eyeballs, puffy cushions of flesh framing them.

"Once more: Where are they?"

The Major seemed to expect a negative reply, for he had his notebook in his hand and had begun writing before she could answer him.

"This is a warrant, Mrs. Linde. You are aware that aiding and abetting fugitives is a serious offense. I will see you in my office for further questioning."

He turned for a last inspection of the havoc his men had made. His attention was caught by a small coin, gleaming

gold, as the sun from the window struck it. He reached for it thoughtfully, puzzled. He tossed it reflectively, once, twice, three times. His fingers tightened on it.

"The idiot!" he exclaimed.

WHEN von Klemmer and his miniature army met Dr. Halvorsen, the Major had already considered that plump person from all angles—had decided he knew nothing of his son's activities, but had decided, further, to keep a close watch on him.

The cherubic doctor led them a brisk march through the forest, but on the climb up the crags, he puffed considerably in the rear.

At the cave they found only the cinders of what had been—a torn scarf, empty cans, a candle-stump. For the second time Friday morning von Klemmer and his brown-shirted troopers arrived too late.

"Schultz! Schultz! Damn it, whenever there is trouble that Schultz disappears." The Major found his aide looking down into the fjord, watching the white water break over the rocks. "A terrible place, Major."

"We are not conducting a class in nature-study. Turn back and rout the whole company out. Search every corner of this fjord you can get into. Wire descriptions to Oslo."

The first clue to be discovered was the absence of Ostergaard's boat. The plump storekeeper wept that he had tied it securely, locked it, as a matter of fact; it was a terrible loss, worth at least three hundred dollars; he could not understand how people he had known all his life should steal it from him.

The sentry at first said he had not heard the fugitives; but when von Klemmer threatened to jug him for incompetence, he stated he had heard them, and then described a running fight in detail. He was sent to the guardhouse for not catching them.

Von Klemmer seemed to recover from his upset. He allowed Ostergaard to purchase temporary immunity with a smuggled bottle of cognac. He sat at a table in the back room of the store and played with a shiny coin the size of a quarter. He wrote a note:

Schultz: Pick up young Halvorsen, the idiot, and bring him to me. We will finish the questioning.

Von Klemmer.

On the North Sea, a coronal glow circling the entire horizon preceded the sunrise.

"We're clear!" cried Rolf. There was no land to be seen. Nels came out.

"I'm all right now," he said. "I must have had fever last night. It's this damn' shoulder."

"Marya?"

"She's sleeping. And you better get some rest too. You've been up all night."

Rolf was irritated by the other's paternal air. "That's all right. Someone has to steer."

"Well, show me what has to be done, and I'll take a watch while you nap."

"I'm not sleepy."

Nels laughed. The water was smooth, and only quivered occasionally, like lemon gelatine. He felt very confident. "Now look, master mariner, in this kind of weather anyone can steer a boat. Why don't you save yourself for storms?"

"Well—" Rolf considered this gravely. "All right. Watch." He showed him the compass. "Keep the needle on this mark."

"On 305 degrees?"

"On this mark," Rolf insisted.

"The throttle is set," the boy continued his instructions. "Don't touch it. If the wind rises, call me."

"I will. Let me repeat: Compass on this mark. Don't touch throttle. Anything happens, call you."

"Right, Nels." Rolf went into the cabin and immediately fell asleep.

Nels sat in the stern, put his hand on the tiller and moved it. The boat changed course. A feeling of power filled him. He steered the boat, enjoying himself. Then he tried to get the compass back on course. This was not as easy as he imagined. All the confusions of reverse motion tricked him. It was like tying a bow by a mirror.

Nels could not understand the fantastic fears and forebodings of the past weeks. He felt strong. He realized with startled delight that he was free. Through the boat he could feel the regular throbbing of the motor, taking him to freedom. A light breeze waved him on. The waters opened a way. To freedom! Nels pushed the throttle handle; the boat slowed. He jerked in the other direction and enjoyed a burst of speed. . . .

A cloud had come up on the horizon. A short narrow thing, like a cigar lying on the waves. No matter. The sky was clear. The wind was gentle. Why did that cloud annoy him? Watch out! He noticed that the compass was way off. He corrected his carelessness. . . .

The cloud was a ship. He was sure now. Sometimes it looked like a cloud; sometimes it seemed a stubby cigar, sometimes just a smudge on the horizon; but he knew it was a ship. His heart tightened, and before he could prevent himself, he had swung the tiller over and was fleeing. It's all right, he tried to reassure himself, it's way off to the east. Must be heading inland. He forced himself to bring the boat back to the original course. . . .

The ship was a destroyer. The turrets were distinctly visible. . . . No, he was dreaming. It wasn't a ship at all, just a small oblong cloud. . . . His eyes hurt.

Nels closed the throttle slightly. Good Lord, off course again. Were his fingers trembling? That sun, beating down. He should have worn a hat, of course.

Definitely, it was a destroyer. "I must wake Rolf," he said aloud. He did not move, but stared fascinated at the eastern horizon.

Everything blurred. Something was wrong beneath his feet too. The motor was sounding unevenly. It coughed. He jiggled the throttle handle. The motor sputtered. "Damn it all!" Off course, once more. He swung back with a sharp brutal jerk.

There was nothing on the horizon. No destroyer, no cigar, no smudge. The cloud was gone. At least, that was good. The motor began to miss. "These lousy boats!"

THESE—it stopped! Throttle—nothing happens. Turn this little screw—no good. "Something wrong in the ignition," he said sagely. "Damn those ignitions! Oh!" he yelled. "Off course! Rolf! Rolf! Rolf!"

Marya and Rolf came running out.

"My shoulder," Nels said. "I'm dizzy. I'll lie down. The motor's stopped." He walked quickly into the cabin.

"Look after him. I'll take care of the motor." Rolf was cross: an hour of sleep was not enough.

Nels sat on the bunk. "I'm sorry. I guess I stalled the motor or something."

"Lie down, my darling. My poor baby, that hot sun on your shoulder."

"This boat shakes awfully," he murmured in misery.

"Sleep, my darling, sleep."

"Oh, God, Marya, I hate this sea. But I'll lick it. . . . I swear I'll lick it."

"You will, Nels. I love you." She whispered little assurances, fragmentary comforts. She could feel herself dividing in two. Mrs. Anders was soothing her husband, sick, hurt and unhappy. Marya wanted to get away, away! Her muscles tightened with the effort to leap up, run, dash out into the open, leave this weak unhappy man. Ah, Eric the Red—where are you? Dead a thousand years!

Well, she had not married a Viking, that was certain.

"This is my cousin," she thought sardonically, "my pleasant, likable, handsome cousin, a man who has been in Oslo, even Copenhagen, an excellent skier, can dance, can out-talk the parson at dinner, brave in his own way when things

can be done with speed and dash while many trumpets drown out the drumming of danger. . . . I don't love this cardboard cut-out of a toy soldier; I don't love him, I don't love him. . . .

"No, no," she ordered herself, "not your cousin, your husband. You love him; you're his wife. You're a wife; a wife loves her husband. A wife. . . . I loved him when we were married."

A deep, almost pleasant pain choked her gently. Marya spoke to herself in ironic daydream.

"I thought you were Eric the Red, little cousin. I saw you bridling the sea, climbing mountains, strong under wounds and heat and cold and starvation. We would hide out, defy the Germans: you would lead me and guard me and protect. . . . Or we'd go to England, organize our exile countrymen, raid Norway, and bring one breath of freedom at least to our people. . . . Or even write V's on the walls like Rolf. . . . Or we might keep liberty alive underground—you driving our stolen car . . . broadcasting the truth to Norway. . . . But we hide in the forest. I sink in weariness and despair. They are chasing us. Your calm, powerful hands set up a tent, comfort me. You devise a plan. They are thrown off the track. Now we dash through the North Sea in our speed-boat. You are the master of the waves, the head man of our— Oh, Lord, what am I doing? God protect and save me!" She sobbed aloud.

Nels stirred. Marya stroked his head distantly.

HOW quiet it was in the slowly rocking cabin! It was taking Rolf a long time to fix the motor. She tiptoed to the door. Rolf, his arms covered with grease and oil, and a black smudge on his cheek, was dismantling the carburetor for the fourth time.

"How is it?"

Rolf was balancing a hidden screw on the end of a long screw-driver. Four times the driver had slipped, and twice he had nearly lost the screw. Therefore he did not answer, but only bent lower.

"Rolf," Marya said, after a while.

"Wait a second." He finished, and turned. "I don't know what's wrong. I'll try it again." He spun the motor till he could no longer lift his arm, but the familiar coughing roar did not come.

"The ignition?" Marya hinted timidly.

"The ignition!" he mocked. "Anything could be wrong—there could be a hole in the back of the boat, and you and Nels would say 'the ignition.' No—I'll look at the oil-line again."

Half an hour later he gave up. "We must have drifted badly. I can't find the trouble. We'll have to go back."

"Go back?" Marya exclaimed. "We can't."

"The motor is dead. God knows what's the matter with it. But it's *not* the ignition."

"We can't go back, Rolf. Fix it. Try again."

"I've tried everything. Next thing you know, we'll lose the whole works overboard."

"What will we do?" Marya said, dazed.

"There's a sail in the locker. Not much, but maybe we can tack to shore. If necessary, Nels and I row."

Marya stared at her brother with the unbelieving horror of a person who sees another dangle a rattlesnake by the tail. "Rolf, we can't return. They're looking for us."

"Not home!" he said impatiently. "We'll land wherever we can. On land, I can unship this motor and fix it."

"Oh, Rolf, try once more. Maybe you've overlooked something."

"No," he replied wearily.

"We can't go back!"

"We can't make Scotland on a broken-down sail—that's certain."

"All right, Rolf. What do I do?"

She helped him hoist the sail, and they steered southeast. It was seven-thirty in the morning. A light east wind shaped the mainsail and pushed the boat along. Rolf

found more canvas in the locker and started rigging up a jib.

Marya held the boom and tiller, and between their respective jerks and pulls, had no time for thought. She was glad of this and closed her mind to everything except the compass line, the curve of the sail and the slap of the sea.

"Marya, what is that?" her brother called. She saw a black mark at the edge of the sky. "That's a ship," said Rolf, "a patrol boat—maybe a destroyer."

"German?"

"Must be. We can't be many miles offshore."

"Can they see us?"

"I don't know."

"Rolf—"

"Yes, sister."

"Will we ever get away?"

"I don't know." He came back and took the sheet.

Marya steered.

Soon it became clear that they were athwart the destroyer's track. When Marya observed it closely its size would not change; but if she looked away and then back, it sprang at her with increasing size and clarity. Another ship at sea destroys the emptiness, fills it with some dynamic emotion. "Hold the sail," Rolf shouted. "I'll get out the nets."

"Oh, Lord," he said a second later. "A girl! They'd surely suspect. Marya—you'll have to hide in the cabin. Get Nels up and send him out."

"He's sleeping."

"Marya!" he cried furiously. He took the tiller. "Run!"

"But what—"

"Hurry, damn it, hurry! The nets are stacked under the bunks." Rolf made the sheet fast, and temporarily locked the tiller with a rope to each gunwale. Everything himself—he'd have to do everything himself. Watch now, if that ripple was a strong puff of wind, the boat would keel, and the cans! Those large fuel-tins, and the barrel standing in the bow. Fishers pulling at their nets—would they have barrels of gasoline on deck? In the cabin? He could never do it. The tins must weigh two hundred pounds apiece. With each second the destroyer grew; now it had become solid; now perhaps they were focusing field-glasses on—Do something!

Nels came out of the cabin, swaying sleepily, carrying the nets. Marya peered out of the low doorway. "What are we doing?"

"Throw those nets in. Any way!" Rolf commanded.

"No, no—fasten them. Marya, help him—tell him how."

"Relax," said Nels, "I know what has to be done!"

ROLF ignored him. "They'll be on top of us in a minute. Marya, turn us. Put them on our stern. Slowly. Watch that boom, Nels!"

He ran forward to the fuel-tanks.

"Nels, come up. Give me a hand."

"What are you going to do?" his sister cried in terror as Rolf strained at the heavy cans.

"That's our fuel," said Nels whitely.

"Not the gas! Rolf! Stop him, Nels! Oh, what are you doing?"

"Into the cabin, Marya," Rolf shouted, almost crying.

"They'll see you."

"We have to?" Nels felt that the boy was his officer.

"Yes, God help us. Over!" He was sobbing now. Every ounce of that liquid was a stride toward freedom. They pushed the cans up on the rail, and let them fall over. One broke, and coated the sea with a glaze of gasoline. Rolf threw quick anxious looks at the approaching warship.

"Pull those nets," he directed Nels, and his voice was hoarse and strained. "We're fishermen. Hide now, Marya. I'll steer."

"Oh, the gas!"

"Look." It was as if their own blood lay in the thin layer on the water; the rainbows that flashed in it were pieces of their hope.

Sometimes Providence, or Chance, grants a prayer in so callous and offhand a manner, that the worshiper, a moment before humbly on his knees beseeching but the faintest tinkle of good luck, now becomes embittered and infuriated, and rises and denounces his salvation.

The destroyer, following a route of its own, turned sharply away, without firing a shot, or blowing a whistle, completely oblivious of Ostergaard's launch and the frantic activity on board it. Fifteen minutes later there was again a dark dash on the horizon, and then low clouds swallowed it up.

Had the warship come close, had they been scrutinized by field-glasses and telescopes, had a warning shot been fired and the order given to heave to, had they been cross-examined by a Prussian officer—in short, had their whole deception been tested and survived—then Rolf and Nels and Marya would have thanked God in concert, and each in his own fashion would have commended himself for alertness and energy.

But now there was the revelation that the destroyer had had no interest in them—and their fuel was gone!

Scotland had become as unattainable as if it had been removed to America.

"They didn't even see us," Nels exploded, "and you dumped the gas."

"Nonsense! He did what was right," Marya replied.

Rolf guided the sailboat in the rising wind and did not answer.

"Do what you want," said Nels. He went back to bed.

THE ship glided easily; the wind was cool; the waves played a spring air on the bow. Slowly they drew the unwilling mariners into harmony. Nels dozed in his bunk. Marya took refuge in the instant pleasure of letting the free wind caress her face. After a while Rolf spoke.

"There are two ways: we can turn round and sail to Scotland with that rag; we can return to Norway, land as far north as we are able, and hide till the war ends."

"I am afraid," Marya replied almost lightly, as if they were advancing arguments for the choice of a summer resort, "I am afraid that it will be many years before the war ends."

"It will be many years before we cross the North Sea in a sailboat like this. A strong wind would knock us over or rip out that fake mast."

"I would rather die on water, Rolf."

"I thought of a third way. I don't know whether it's brilliant or crazy. I think Sigurd would have liked it. Let us go back to our own fjord, back to the Freedom Senders."

"Back into the trap?" she cried.

"Will they expect us to come landward? You will hide. Nels and I are fishermen returning with a catch. No one will recognize the boat."

"But why there?"

"They still have half the gasoline that was on that German boat."

"No, Rolf," she replied dully, "I couldn't go through all this again."

He disregarded her, rushed on in the enthusiasm of his own plot. "We fix the motor, load on the rest of the gas, sneak out, and we're back where we were this morning—on the way to freedom."

"All right. Do what you want."

Rolf became furious. "That's what your husband said!" Marya's head jerked up, amazed. Rolf went on, the violence of his words communicated to the boat through the rudder made the whole world seem to shake and shudder.

"You're giving up. You're like him; just let the next thing happen. Do nothing. Sit and drift. Sleep a little, groan a little, get shot. All right, maybe we will get caught—blown up like Sigurd. That's better than starving in the mountains till the Gestapo picks us up, or tacking around the ocean till our eyes fall out. You were the one who started this—practically drove us to escape. You did it for

him." He gestured toward the cabin. "Well, now do it for yourself, or for me, or for Eric the Red, or for a cobweb, I don't give a damn. . . . Don't cry," he added hastily.

"I'm not crying," she said happily, in a clear resonant tone, and went over and kissed him. "To the fjord, brother!"

"We'll be there in a wink. I'll get hold of the sea-dragon's tail, sister."

"Remember that day when we lay on the cliff, and you threw stones into the water?"

The sea-dragon pulled but feebly that day. It was four in the afternoon before they sighted land, and six-thirty when they saw the mouth of the fjord. But once there, Rolf's guess proved right. The sea was full of German boats, but they were seeking fugitives, not returning fishermen. Also at six began the vision-defeating twilight of temperate climates, that yields neither to unaided eyesight nor searchlights.

They were not a hundred yards from the Freedom Senders' hideout, and yet as effectively barred from entrance as if a hundred yards of concrete were in their way. It was painfully impossible to sail a boat past those growling rocks. Rolf had a vague idea of the channel, but any attempt in the half-light would have been fatal. They continued on, and pulled in to shore at the first opportunity. Then began the long hike alongshore, hacking and tearing a way through the brush, climbing with nails and toes over sudden rocky outcroppings, stumbling through marshes, tripping, falling, staggering on. Nels went forward as in a daze, but his face was composed, and he smiled to himself as if he had a secret.

Finally they entered the cove almost by the same path that Marya had followed when she found the Freedom Senders that ironic wedding night. Rolf took a breath and a gulp of whisky, and then the long trail back to the boat with Kristaver. Marya and Nels slept, each hardly knowing the other was there. . . .

"There," said Rolf, "that motor! God knows what is wrong with it."

Kristaver examined it carefully. "The ignition," he said. Fifteen minutes later they drove it into the cove, the motor purring with exaggerated innocence.

On the way, Rolf bought two tanks of German gasoline.

"I can't give you any more fuel," Kristaver had said, smiling. "You will have to pay for it."

"What can we give you?"

"Nothing. But you can take something. Take this to England for me." It was a large manila envelope, carefully sealed, and weighted with lead sinkers.

"Is that all?" asked Rolf, incredulously.

"It's a lot. If you are taken, this turns you from a prisoner to a spy, replaces bars by bullets."

"I see. May I know what is in it?"

"You must! When you can, I want you to study the map. If you have to throw it overboard, you must remember the places where I have indicated troop-concentrations."

"This is a map of the Norway coast?"

"Of the Germans on it."

WHEN they landed, Rolf was able to announce triumphantly that the motor was fixed, that a renewal of the fuel supply was assured, and that everything was in readiness to run the gantlet again.

He expected general rejoicing, but Marya merely nodded, and Nels said firmly and decisively that he was not leaving dry land any more. Nels, for all his determination, had that weatherbeaten look of a husband who has nearly been drowned in his first marital storm.

Marya bit her lip. "I really don't care, Nels."

But Rolf did. "Are you crazy, Nels?" he exclaimed. "This whole escape is for you. We're doing it to save you."

"I don't want to be saved," Nels replied stubbornly.

Rolf could not stand the uninterest in the other's voice, and sprang at him, striking wildly.

"Hold it," cried Kristaver, roaring with laughter. "You can't rescue a man by brute force." He pushed them apart. "Take a rest, Rolf," he said in his deepest tones.

"Please, Rolf,"—Marya led him off,—"you're irritable. You need sleep."

"Oh!" he shook her arm off in fury, and dived into the bunk. For two minutes he was raging, and the next he was asleep.

Hjalmar and Kristaver built a campfire.

Nels drew Marya out of the glow and whispered pleadingly and tenderly: "I am going over the mountains. Will you come?" Marya strove to free herself from his grasp. "All right," he barked, "I leave in the morning. Good night." Nels disappeared into the cabin of Ostergaard's boat, and came out again, carrying two blankets. "I am going to sleep also. But not in a boat."

THEY sat in the small warmth of the fire, each seeing his own thoughts in the ashes: Hjalmar saw his father's ruddy face dancing and twinkling in the flame, while an expression of intolerable anguish passed through it with every gust of wind; Kristaver saw a carefully marked map of coastline, the product of two years of bold scouting; Marya saw herself, deeply troubled.

"To go over the hills will be fatal," said Kristaver impersonally.

"Oh, why did we turn back?" murmured Marya in agony. "Do not look at him; do not listen to that voice," she told herself over and over.

"Do you wish your husband to live? Or your brother?" he added as she made no answer. "Decidedly, Rolf was right—we must save him by force," Kristaver continued inflexibly. There was no answer.

"We have your tacit permission, then," he said. She nodded.

Hjalmar shrugged. He was not interested. But at a sign from Kristaver, he followed him into the darkness.

What were they going to do? Marya felt paralyzed. She could not move; and inside, demons were torturing her. "Your husband," one said, "what a husband! He hates you. He thinks you are trying to drown him. And you hate him too, Marya," another little whisper swept through her mind. "No, I don't," she wept. "Oh, God," she prayed, "don't make me fall in love now—now when I must be clear and free, to think and do right . . . don't make me fall in love with that red beard, that pipe, those arms that will take me and crush me and comfort me. . . I will keep my eyes closed; I will keep my mind closed; I will—" She began to croon nursery rhymes in a low voice. Her lips were pale from strain and lack of sleep.

Kristaver and Hjalmar returned.

"He's in the cabin now. Don't be worried by the breathing," Kristaver said. "The morphine will wear off before morning."

"Morphine?" Marya echoed. That was the only word she had heard.

"Don't be afraid; he'll be all right. Now, smile!"

Suddenly Hjalmar said: "Morphine is a part of a spy's kit." This was the first word he had spoken since morning.

The night hung on the border of the fire, a great curtain of misty layers. The light played fleetingly on Hjalmar's drawn face. He stared into the dark as though determining the exact spot where it gave way to firelight. Kristaver's pipe had burnt out. The fire heightened Marya's color. He saw the sweeping plane from shoulder to back. The lines of her body relaxed; the tautness seeped from them. Disturbed by her silence, Kristaver asked: "You're quiet, Marya. Is something wrong?"

"Leave me alone, can't you!" There was a physical force in the words; and Kristaver, surprised by her violence, relit his pipe and stared frowningly into the flames. A strange girl!

He rose leisurely, stretched, and strolled along the wooded bank. "Damn it!" and he kicked at the underbrush.

"I didn't mean it. Oh, Kristaver, forgive me." She overtook him, panting. "You've been so good—all you've done for us! I wouldn't do anything—" Sobs checked her words. She stood, head bent in her hands, tears trickling through her fingers. He put his arms around her.

"You mustn't cry, Marya. You mustn't cry, dear." The tremors that shook her body passed into his. His arms tightened, and she reached both hers around his neck.

"Let me stay with you. I love you, Kristaver. I love you. You are red—like Eric."

He stopped her words with his lips. "Marya," he said, pushing her at arms'-length and regarding her almost sadly with his red-brown eyes.

"There's so little time, Kristaver, and you know nothing—nothing of why I love you, or when—nothing of Eric, or—Kristaver, I won't go with Nels. I want to be with you. I love you. But you—maybe you hate me, or don't want me. I must be crazy. How can you love me when I talk like this?"

He wrapped both arms about her shoulders and stroked her into quietness.

"You love me?" Marya questioned into his beard.

"Yes, Marya—I love you."

"Then it's all right, everything's all right. I'm glad."

"That's good, Marya."

She leaned into him as they walked. His arm around her waist was steel. The night hung like gossamer about them, caressing, even as they parted it. He matched his stride to hers. She was proud of the curbed gentleness of him.

"You're not real," he said, "you are a Viking maid whose spirit was imprisoned in a tree."

"Yes, yes, and only you could release me. Oh, Kristaver, you are not real yourself. I know, because I invented you. You are part my father, part Eric the Red, and part someone I dreamed up long ago. Joanna laughed at me once, for being in love with a pipe, a fish-net and a voice. But they all turned into you, all of them."

"Marya! Marya!" Rolf's voice cut between them.

"No, not yet. Kristaver, no!" Furiously she held him.

"Marya!" The word choked in the red beard.

"Marya!" Rolf's voice was echoing Kristaver's.

"Don't say anything—not good-by. I love you."

CHAPTER FOURTEEN



SUNDAY is a work of art that few vandals can destroy. On Sunday even in occupied countries people meet and piece together their broken bits of lives. On Sunday there is a momentary and soul-saving illusion of peace. But it is only momentary. Even while the minister intones consolation from Isaiah, the minds of the listeners wander from those strong words of comfort.

The multitude of camels shall cover thee, the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah; all they from Sheba shall come; they shall bring gold and incense—

But what of butter, or a cut of beef? Or sugar, a thing unheard of!

Surely the isles shall wait for me, and the ships of Tarshish first, to bring thy sons from far—

Yes, and Mrs. Linde's son, hunted on the sea.

And now a cry: "Lord have mercy on me!"

A buzz of whispering; that was Mrs. Linde, poor woman—son and daughter gone, and neither farewell nor chance of reunion.

The glory of Lebanon shall come unto thee, the fir tree, the pine tree, and the box together, to beautify the place of my sanctuary.

Outside, the wind of the Lord bent in benediction the fir tree and the pine tree on this land, once so free and fertile. The congregation breathed heavily; the minister closed the book. There was a silence of longing.

Then a voice spoke out of the sky.

More accurately, it came from somewhere in the roof of the church, but its booming echoes disguised the source.

"Northmen!" filled the church. The congregation froze in superstitious awe. "*Here only in church are you together, and though we commit sacrilege, here must we give you our message. We are the Freedom Sending station.*"

"Radio!" someone cried.

"My old loudspeaker," moaned Ostergaard in horror, recognizing the tinny edge on the speaker's voice.

"*For the rest of Norway we will go on the air again at a better hour. For you we have a message.*"

A German soldier sitting in the back jumped up and ran out to give the alarm. The people were in complete confusion.

"Tear it down," cried some.

"Find it," challenged others.

"In church!" gasped the pious.

"The Freedom Senders!" cried the children.

"Listen!" said a few.

The announcer continued steadily: "*Among you is a man who has sown disaster throughout Norway, who is responsible for the deaths of Sigurd Svan, Johan Andersen and Harald Myran, who walks among you and spies on you: Dr. Arnt Halvorsen. We warn you as we warned the citizens of Ostraat, remember that name—Halvorsen. . . . Speak to him only with cold steel!*"

ON the street children whispered. "Look, here comes Hjalmar. Look, look, the idiot!"

They did not venture too near, but he heard the tittering and whispering close up behind him and open in front. From banter it swelled to threats, hisses, cat-calls.

"Son of a Quisling—Hird rat!"

"Hush, boys. He is not to blame, poor halfwit." Kindly Mrs. Pederson interceded for him. But he scarcely knew. He had already sketched this scene in his mind, and the reality was to be walked through quickly. A stone struck his shoulder—sharp! It didn't matter. He was tired, but he had held together before Kristaver. That was good. The broadcast was over. That was good too.

Now he wanted just to go home—lie in bed, maybe sleep. Get rid of this shame. Why shame? Why must it be his too? He had no part in it.

What had they done to that traitor in Ostraat? Sixteen knives in him. His father's plump, jolly little body, that he bathed and powdered so scrupulously—sixteen knives!

So the strange band proceeded, Hjalmar leading, in a semicircle of angry children.

Their elders turned to watch; some joined with low mutterings pierced and shot through with curses.

They reached the doctor's house. The crowd grew silent. Hjalmar climbed the steps slowly, turned the door-knob. Locked! He knocked—no answer. Had they already—The suspicion beat into his brain.

He pushed his shoulders to the door, struck furiously with his knuckles.

"He's in there—make him come out." The words were shouted up from the crowd.

He looked at the windows—barred and bolted. His stomach rose in his throat.

He could see it clearly: his father crouched inside, trembling at each sound—caught, trapped in his own house! In what a frenzy must he have locked and bolted! And only when he was securely fastened in, would he sink moaning into his study-chair, perspiration on his pink face and the palms of his pudgy hands, eyes bulging—waiting for the knives?

Thirty pair of eyes strained to detect reaction in Hjalmar. But he stood with his back to them. It was hard to

tell from a back. But didn't the idiot stand with pride, almost?

A troop of soldiers marched into the crowd, which gave way on all sides as though the plague swept through it.

"Up Halvorsen's steps, see, see! The halfwit surrounded! They are taking him away. . . . Run, run, from the swastika and the brown boots. . . . But the idiot can't run. The Gestapo have him!" And the crowd dissolved. . . .

The picture that had flashed through Hjalmar's mind was accurate enough. The first wild terror at hearing the radio speak his denunciation released a thousand springs of frantic activity in Dr. Halvorsen. Rushing home, he nailed and bolted himself in. Only when he was securely locked in did it occur to him he might have boarded up an assassin with him.

With clammy hands he opened each closet door, stooped until his rounded belly touched his knees, to be sure no one was lurking under beds or sofa.

When his search was finished, the doctor sank with relief into the overstuffed study-chair. Only then did he allow himself to nurse his injured finger. In his window-trailing haste, he had brought the hammer down on the finger instead of the nail. So now he applied salves and ointments, bandaged and rebandaged. This routine occupation quieted his nerves, and he began thinking more rationally of safety and escape. The German Headquarters—he would apply there. Von Klemmer would certainly arrange to deport him to a fresh center. He had been valuable here; he would be useful elsewhere; a good man was always needed. He would wait till night, and in the dark make his way to headquarters.

He shivered as he thought of the four blocks to be traversed, and searched around in his mind for another way. He could think of nothing else. To claim the protection of von Klemmer, that was the wisest, the safest.

But how had he been discovered? It seemed impossible, a nightmare. The Freedom Senders—who were these devils that probed into your very mind—and disclosed you to the world?

God, what was that? A knock at the door sent him cowering against the cushions. It was repeated, again and again. Each blow sank into him, along his body.

"Oh," moaned the doctor, his pudgy fists beating ineffectually against the chair back, "they're coming for me, the damn' fishermen are trying to break in! Von Klemmer won't let them. I was a faithful servant, a clever one. They mustn't get in." The words became blubbing, and tears trickled down his rosy cheeks.

The knocking stopped. He listened with every nerve in his body. Nothing. Then the rhythmic sound of marching. Soldiers on his steps, he judged. So they had come to protect him. Von Klemmer was guarding him from mob violence and protests.

He strained for every sound from the outside, and after a moment heard the measured march of boots retreating.

IT was seven o'clock before Dr. Halvorsen decided it was dark enough to risk those four blocks to Headquarters. He had dressed carefully an hour before. He chose shoes with built-up heels, and a hat to give him height and so disguised himself.

Before leaving, he made a circuit of the windows, peering carefully from each to be sure he was not watched. He undid the chains to the back door, and with trembling fingers turned up his coat-collar and slipped into the alleyway. . . .

"For God's sake, let me in, man—they're after me." The soldier looked down at the roly-poly figure of Dr. Halvorsen, and disdainfully lifted his bayonet from across the door. Halvorsen sank in a distraught heap on the nearest bench and jerkily mopped at his face and neck.

When he had recovered himself, he walked to the door marked "Information" and asked to see Major von Klemmer immediately.

The soldier attendant repeated his name into the telephone.

"The Major will see you at once. Follow me."

Von Klemmer greeted him with more than usual affability, and at the end of the hysterical tale, replied:

"You did right, Dr. Halvorsen, in applying to me. You have been a most valuable agent. In fact, your latest exploits have led to the capture of one of the Freedom Senders." And as Halvorsen looked his surprise:

"Yes, Dr. Halvorsen, I am convinced that you yourself are not aware of, and do not fully appreciate, your own talents. You remember you suggested Marya Anders could not have aided her husband alone, and in fact produced the pipe-cleaner as evidence that someone, possibly the Freedom Senders, was working with her?"

"Yes," chimed in the doctor eagerly. "I remember very clearly. And you acted on my suggestion, Major?"

"Acted on it, my dear Halvorsen? It is that suggestion of yours that led directly to the capture."

The little man expanded visibly. So he wasn't just a played-out agent, but had been active in tracking down one of the most famous scoundrels in the country.

"Have you time to give me any of the particulars, Major?"

"Certainly. I had intended to. At your suggestion, then, that Marya Anders was working in connection with someone, possibly the Freedom Senders, I stopped at her home and with an efficient squad searched the place. The girl and her brother had escaped, but I found an interesting clue on the floor near the bedroom window. This clue I recognized almost immediately, and I think it will be familiar to you too, Doctor. At any rate this established the person's identity at once, and also explained the broadcast this morning."

Why this long preamble? Why didn't he say what he had to say?

"The young man was not in the town, but preparing, as it turned out later, for a broadcast." The Major laughed. His teeth were pointed like an animal's, Dr. Halvorsen thought. He shivered. What was it? He felt uneasy.

"However, we waited, and soon the quarry returned. Too long an absence would provoke suspicion, and so he returned as we had calculated, and paraded through the village. Now where do you suppose we caught him?"

Where? Why should he suppose? He groped in his mind for a connection with all this. He felt close to it, familiar almost, but with what? Nonsense, get hold of yourself.

"On the steps of his father's house. Excellent, is it not? On his father's porch!"

The Major reached into his vest pocket and pulled out a coin which he tossed up and down. Dr. Halvorsen's eyes followed it.

What? Hjalmar? Hjalmar had got on his nerves with his coin-flipping. But what could von Klemmer mean?

"I see you are still puzzled, my dear Doctor. If you will be so good as to follow me into the corridor, I shall clarify the mystery."

Halvorsen followed. He was frightened. The Major struck his knuckles against a door with a silver "3" on it.

A SEARCHLIGHT was trained on the boy who swung back and forth like a spider dangling from a thread. . . . He was tied by his wrists in such a way that his feet escaped the floor by three inches. By straining his arches and toes, he could lessen this distance to a half-inch. Sweat covered his body like a film.

The contrast of lights made it impossible immediately to discern the three men who were guardians of this scene. One sat at a desk keeping scrupulous notes of every groan and word Hjalmar uttered. Another sat tilting his chair back and forth; in his lap lay a rubber hose. The third person acted as sentinel. He stood by the door, at attention. At the creaking of the door, Hjalmar opened his

eyes and looked into those of his father. His lips turned back on his gums; there were bloodstains on his mouth.

"Father," the word forced its way out from behind locked teeth. He fastened his eyes on that fat man with the doleful countenance. Blackness was closing in again. —Try to keep that face before you, that fat, gnome face that tied you here. That is pulling your arms from your sockets. That face—traitor—father—betrayed. All words are one!

Words! Yes, they had wanted him to tell about the hide-out—Kristaver. . . . That was funny, they thought there was a whole band of Freedom Senders—funny!

The face in front of him blurred. Hjalmar saw himself sitting before von Klemmer. He had kept up his madness act, until he saw he was betrayed—then knew it was hopeless.

He had been almost glad to discard his act. He would tell nothing. He felt proud when he said it, a martyr—a hero. They had tried every inducement: bribery, trickery. He had said nothing. The pride was still in him; he wished Kristaver could know. Even as they tied the chains on his wrists, his courage had held. But now, where was that pride now?

He sank his teeth through his lips to keep himself from crying out all they wanted. The blood from his mangled wrists trickled down his arms. It flaked on his mouth as he tried to call out to that chubby face before him. That face— Oh, God, that face!

UNMOVING, Halvorsen stood by the door. Hjalmar! His son, his boy, twitching, moaning, writhing at a rope's-end. The boy fixed him with his eyes; he tried to turn, escape. He couldn't. "Father!" from those parched lips, that word—the accusation! Oh, God! The boy had been mad, an idiot, and now, now when it wasn't true, when he was whole, perfect, sane, they were tearing him apart. His boy, his boy! "But I did it, I betrayed him! The Major said it was I—I! But I didn't know, son. Don't look at me like that—I didn't know!"

Dr. Halvorsen buried his head and moaned into soft fingers. When the Major led him out, his boy still hung, swaying gently.

The door with the silver "3" closed behind von Klemmer, and the little man stumbled into the hall.

"What seems to be the trouble, Doctor? Perhaps a spot of brandy will fix you up. Step into the office a minute."

Halvorsen let himself gratefully into the chair, and while the Major mixed drinks, he conquered the lust for murder that swelled in him.

"Major von Klemmer," he broke out, "for God's sake, stop this. Don't let him suffer like that, it's— Whatever information you want from the boy, I'll get for you. I promise you. Have I ever failed? Think, Major! I'll track down the Freedom Senders. I'll question Hjalmar myself, I'm his father. He'll listen to me! I'll make him! Only stop this! Major, I've been faithful. Think, I beg you—all I've done—those boys, and—let him go; I'll take him away—anywhere, anything. But stop this torture!"

"I know what you're thinking, but it's not true. He's my son, whole, well, sane—my son! Maybe I felt resentment against him, and was tortured by what he was, and all I'd planned for him. But now, when I see my boy—misguided, yes—but sane and—oh, God, don't you see? He's well!"

The Major regarded him with the eyes of a scientist in the dissecting-room.

"You've got to stop this, do you hear! Every minute that he hangs there—damn you, cut him down, I say! I'll go higher than you, von Klemmer. I'm a valuable agent. They'll listen to me. Cut him down, I tell you. Cut my boy down!"

Dr. Halvorsen sprang across the desk. His rounded fingers dug into von Klemmer's throat, but not before the Major, suddenly alarmed, had pressed the button that called his orderly.

The fury of the little man gave him strength, and with clawing hands he gouged the smirk from von Klemmer's mouth.

The room filled with soldiers. They dragged Halvorsen from the half-conscious major, into their midst. His plump legs gave way, and he would have fallen, but for the rough hands that hoisted him up. His body was limp; tears ran over his face. The soldiers led him out. . .

One of the soldiers reached over, and without getting up, poked a rubber hose into Hjalmar's side.

"Coming to?"

"Yes, I think so."

A low moan from the boy, and then a whimpering: "Fire, I'm on fire. Oh, it hurts, the burning hurts me. My arms, my arms have fire."

"What's he mumbling about?"

"Can't make it out. Something about fire."

The flames curled about his flesh, lapping up his arms, eating him.

Hjalmar began to cry: "Flames burn Hjalmar, eat Hjalmar. Burn, eat, burn, burn, burn—fire burns."

"Say, what is this? He's muttering like a madman."

"Yes, he did that when we brought him in. But he soon got over it."

The sergeant at the desk walked up to him. "Look, Halvorsen," he said, "this isn't going to get you anywhere."

"Hurt, it hurts Hjalmar."

"This is going to hurt a lot worse if you don't shut up."

The soldier with the hose had joined the sergeant.

"Fire, on fire, fire, fire, fire."

"Damn you, I said stop it." The words and the hose struck him at the same time. Hjalmar screamed. He hung there and screamed.

"You fool," barked the sergeant, "look what you did!"

For a half hour Hjalmar screamed. Then he stopped, exhausted. His head sank on his chest; his breathing came in fitful gasps. A monotone of gibbering bubbled from his lips.

"Cut him down. He's really mad now."

"Really mad is right!"

The boy fell in a disjointed heap on the floor. From the pain, the burning, he found his way through to one word; he grasped it, held to it and it seemed to bring him comfort.

"Mad," he whispered, "really mad now." And he smiled.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN



N Monday morning Kristaver awoke to find German torpedo boats scattered all over the fjord. By noon he saw they were

searching. He grew concerned. Hjalmar had not come. At three o'clock he became convinced that the torpedo boats were maintaining a continuous watch. He decided to make a scouting expedition.

He found the roads covered with soldiery, the woods filled. He could see the patrol boats nosing into every navigable inlet.

Returning to the hide-out, he found Hjalmar had not come. It was six-thirty. He lit his pipe. For the first time in his life he did not enjoy the taste.

He began to speculate on Hjalmar's fate. This did not encourage him. It was appallingly clear that a giant search was on—for himself!

He decided to wait till night. But after sundown, the patrol was doubled. For a long time that night he lay awake. In the morning, he saw a destroyer in the fjord.

He summed up the facts as follows: they had Hjalmar, where they could squeeze him; they had him too, but they could not squeeze him. How long would Hjalmar hold out before he was pulp?

Kristaver smoked furiously. He had no plan.

Above, dark broken clouds radiating snakily like the roots of a fallen oak, streaked in a demented scrawl on a slate-gray ceiling; a fog-hidden sun, invisible and oppressive; a wet moldy smell in the air, dank with rot and mildew; below, soft, clinging mud, grass whips, clawing bushes; within, twisting, rending pain, pounding aches, blue and green agony; without, the world whirled. Hjalmar Halvorsen wandered, taking short aimless steps.

"Really mad now! He's really mad now," he chanted to a formless tune of his own, "He's really, really, really, really, mad now, mad now. Now mad, mad now; now mad, mad now; really, really mad now!" On and on that monotone moan went, circling in semitones and quarter-tones around one note of the scale, and then sliding with a grating whine to a higher tone, till finally words and music lost their meaning and resolved into one confusion.

Yet he treasured the words, and loved the song with a crooning tenderness. It represented his pardon.

"He's really mad now," the sergeant had said in disgust, and ordered them to cut him down, kick him out. "Maybe the nut will wander back to the old hiding-place. Two men watch him!"

The boy stumbled toward the fjord. He was convinced his arms were on fire; he saw his fingers curling and writhing like flames. He would lie in the fjord and put it out.

HE did not even see the men. Smoke from his arms filled his eyes. He bumped into Ole Tonetsen and sat down on the ground, staring.

"Boy," said Tonetsen, conveying reproof, authority, commiseration, and giving the end of the word an extra inflection which meant: "Go away; this is not for children."

It was not. Four men, hard old fishermen, stood around the body of Sigurd Svan. His face was scored by pebbles.

Two old men supported another who seemed their grandfather, so completely had senility overtaken him. His face was sunken in like a punctured balloon. The skin of his hands and arms was dry, coarse, cracked with innumerable furrows. This was Peter Svan. He watched the dead boy quietly, waiting for him to speak.

"Well," said Tonetsen with a sigh.

Peter Svan drew himself up, "Please leave us," he said to the other men.

"No, Peter," Olesen replied, meaning that they could not leave the body there, lying on its side, one arm thrown over its head, just as it had been washed up; meaning also that it was not wise for an old man to stand and stare in this stormy weather.

"Go!" Svan said forcefully. The others turned and left.

"All right," said Tonetsen with extreme reluctance. "Come," he ordered Hjalmar, who hovered around the group. The idiot fled screaming at his touch, and gibbered at him from a distance. Tonetsen made a sucking noise which signified, "He's getting worse, poor boy," and the three fishermen tramped off.

Hjalmar cooled his arms in the water, but he could not extinguish the fire which burned as furiously beneath the water. The sky started to peel off in large pink-and-yellow triangles. This frightened him, and he ran to the Svans for protection.

The grandfather squatted on the beach and took his boy's head in his lap and tenderly smoothed the slack inelastic skin.

"A long hike, Sigurd," he said with gentle reproof. "It was not right. You have caused me much worry. I am old. I have not long to live. You must postpone your hikes until after I die—so I can see more of you while I am here."

Hjalmar showed the old man his arms. "Burning!" he said piteously.

"Wet," Svan replied. "You see the boy is soaked through to the skin. And yet he will lie there. Children have no idea of how to take care of themselves. His mother will be upset."

"Burning," Hjalmar replied.

"I forgot. My daughter is dead. I forget these things. Sometimes I doubt whether I am alive myself, I live so much among people who I later remember are dead. You see, Sigurd, it is a good thing that you have come home. I am getting too old to take care of myself. My memory is very uncertain—very uncertain."

"He is really mad now—really, really."

"No, I don't think so. Of course, it is foolish to lie in the sand, but Sigurd is a strange lad."

"Really mad—mad now, now, now mad."

"It is a terrible day, grandson. When that black sky opens, the water will crush us. Come home. We can have a fire."

"That sky is full of broken bones," Hjalmar said vindictively.

"Come home," Peter Svan pleaded.

Sometime later he said softly: "It is a good thing that he has come home."

"He is really mad," Hjalmar replied.

"Watch—he is going to speak. Sigurd is going to answer us!"

They waited for a long time.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN



OME stones the sea smooths and polishes, erasing their features and reducing them to a blank serenity; others it cuts and

slashes with bold sure strokes, producing strong lines, decided corners, proud straight planes; other rocks are worn into a sort of fretful raggedness, studded with discordant splinters, constantly chipping and crumbling.

Continued and unrelaxing danger had a narcotic effect on Marya. For two days they had been sailing mined waters. Below and on every side were round black metal balls, some radiating tentacles like robot octopi. During the day the fugitives stood watch; at night they prayed. Fortunately most of the mines were anchored yards below the keel of their little boat. But occasionally they would see one broken loose from its mooring, bobbing awkwardly across their path. Once they passed a place where some trick of the current had gathered a school of mines, and these bumped and nodded their ugly heads in ominous rhythm. The ocean wore a harness of silent bombs. To Marya, it seemed a watery graveyard peopled by the ghosts of spent air-raids.

At first it is hard to go to sleep when death may come aboard with every minute; it seems that to relax your grip on time even for an instant is to lose it forever. Then, later, it is hard to wake, to draw back the soft curtain and see the same endless ocean studded with plants of destruction.

So Marya settled into a calm of inattention, rather than acquiescence. Home, Eric the Red, her wedding, the Viking's Cave, dumping the gasoline, Kristaver, Ostergaard's boat, Rolf welded to the tiller, sick Nels, the North Sea, the mines—all appeared equally remote.

This would go on forever, she thought.

In the midst of that wet waste, it was hard to visualize land. The two days of their trip stretched out behind her like years. She felt as if she had loved Kristaver in another life. Kristaver, she thought sadly. She would never see him again. He was a dream, a vision of old times, cast up by the sea like Eric the Red. The Northmen were dead and gone, a thousand years ago. . . .

Two days of adventure had torn the shells of weariness and irritability from Rolf. He blazed with strength and courage, and rejoiced boyishly in every danger and hardship. He was at the tiller all day and most of the night. When he felt sleepy, he would splash salt water over his face. Nothing annoyed him. He treated Nels with kindly

firmness, as if the older man were merely a cranky child. He sang songs to his sister, described Nels' future as a pilot, cursed the floating mines; and when there was no one else to talk to, Rolf held long jolly conversations with Ostergaard's boat, which, on account of its color, he had named the *Seaweed*. At night he would check his course by the stars, and amuse himself by counting and naming those cold brilliant flashes. Their strange Arabian names delighted his tongue: Caph and Alpheratz that pinned the zero-hour line to the sky; Algol, that inconstant eye; Benet-nasch, that swung proud and gleaming in the tail of the Great Bear; Phad and Dubhe, that pointed the way to the north. He sailed his ship in the blue sky waters, and fancied that the planets floated by. In his mind echoed that old legend that sea and sky meet in the breakers of the Milky Way. . . .

For Nels there were neither dreams nor adventure. Bitterness and self-hate ruled his hours. He called himself *coward*, but he trembled at those black balls of dynamite; nightmares of choking wet death pursued him. He called himself *weakling*, but he could not defy Rolf's assumption of command. He could not whip himself into action.

When late Saturday afternoon he awakened from a clinging, drugged slumber, and felt the sea tossing beneath him, Nels' mind came to a complete stop, paralyzed by his inability to connect past and present. At first he believed that this was just a continuation of the first voyage, and that the whole episode of the German destroyer and the gasoline-tins was an unusually striking dream. Then he remembered those arms in the night, the powerful grasp, the needle in his shoulder, the hard hand over his mouth. Where was he? Captured? Kidnaped? Where? Why?

Slowly his mind filled in time, backward. He recalled the quarrel with Marya, the fight with her brother, his black jealousy of the bearded giant. He recognized the cabin of Ostergaard's boat. "Save him by force"—hadn't Rolf said that? Where were they now? Was there a chance?

He rushed out of the cabin. As far as he could see, there was gray sky and gray water.

His wife was kneeling in the stern, bailing. She looked up and met a glance of unrelieved hatred. Nels turned and went back into the cabin, and for two days they saw him only when Marya unlocked the chest for food.

Nels and Marya no longer were speaking to each other. Several times she was on the verge of asking how he felt. She wanted to nurse his shoulder and make him more comfortable, but she was afraid he might construe it as affection.

He could not understand why she was there at all. Why hadn't she stayed with Kristaver? He remembered the times Kristaver had brought food to the cave.

The fourth day out, Marya decided to prove her indifference by talking to her husband. She determined to say a few casual words; but somehow she never found a suitable opportunity.

ON that day, too, Nels came to a decision. His shoulder was better, having improved with neglect, a circumstance that angered Marya more than anything else. Also he had come out of his last attack of sea fear, and now the water was no longer bubbling death, but just water. Therefore, Nels resolved to assume the leadership that should have been his from the beginning.

He went up to Rolf and offered to take a watch at the wheel.

"Not now," Rolf replied; "but if you want to work, you can pull up one of our reserve tins and fill the motor—or you can bail—"

"Or I can sweep the deck," said Nels, laughing shortly. But he went forward and began to pull one of the heavy tins along the deck.

Marya came and helped him. Each watched the tin, memorizing the streaked greasy surface. Nels was shaken

by longing and confused desire. He did not dare to look at his wife. He wanted to fling himself at that firm proud mouth, fold those defiant shoulders to him.

Nels was racked by alternate spasms of hate and love, and each time the reaction was greater. He clenched his hands, that would beat and caress her; his arms trembled; his mouth was contorted; and his eyes were desperate with bitter self-knowledge.

"Crazy fool," he told himself, "you love her, you want her, but you can't have her. Why? Because you are grass-backed, with guts of soft lead, because you can't stand up and spit into the sea.

"God," he groaned in fury, "she is right! She has saved me, she has cared for me, planned, fought, hidden. . . . Poor baby, what a honeymoon."

THEN the tide of his remorse, retreating, uncovered many stony jealousies. He saw Kristaver; he felt the morphine needle; he heard himself saying: "I am going over the mountains. Will you come?" Self-pity put its sweet wet fingers over his eyes—what a honeymoon!

Fight! Act! Do something! He fought to free himself from inward analysis and brooding. Leaning over the gunwale, he stared at the sea, trying to conquer a hidden, growing urge to throw himself in.

Just a lot of salt water, he reasoned with himself. A drop of prussic acid was deadlier. Falling into water wasn't like falling through air, where there is nothing to buoy you up. You fall into water, thrash your arms, and you float. It is simple. Just fall in, slowly fall. . . .

"Nels!" Marya screamed.

"Nothing, nothing," he muttered. "I just lost my balance."

"You nearly fell overboard."

"I was watching the fish. Are there sharks in these waters?"

"There are sharks," Rolf answered.

Marya waited for Nels to say something else. She wanted to rush to him. She did not move.

That was bad, Nels reflected. Old black vat nearly pulled me in that time. Stand up! Don't look at it.

"Rolf," he said, "you've been up enough. The weather is fine; let me take the wheel. Get some rest." ("I'll beat you, sea, I'll maul you. Give me a boat in my hand, and I'll cut you into froth.")

"Okay," Rolf replied with lofty good nature. "Action will do you good. —Call me, if anything goes wrong," he told Marya.

Rolf went to sleep in his clothes, prepared to spring to the aid of his passengers.

Nels settled himself: watch the compass, watch the waves, watch the horizon, watch the throttle, watch the compass. . . .

"Nels," said Marya. He did not look up. Watch the throttle; watch the oil-line; watch the compass. . . . She walked away to the bow. The sea was extraordinarily steady. A light curtain of mist hid the horizon. The mist sifted into her. She went into the cabin.

Nels was alone. "I should have said something; I should have let her come back. . . . I will have her. I will take her back. I will kill the ocean first."

He knew the North Sea was preparing for the struggle. The mist thickened. The water shook with impending violence. The air was suffocating.

His hand was tight on the tiller. He gazed straight ahead. He did not dare to guess what horrors lay on his right and left.

Fog rolled across the sea. He glanced at the compass. He bit his tongue, and kept the boat on course. The fog climbed in and sat on the thwart. He could barely see the hump of the cabin in front of him. His voice was dead in his throat.

A slight clicking noise came from close behind the boat. Nels fancied the sharks were waiting for a victim.

The fog billowed and spun. It pressed wetly against his cheek. It swirled into his eyes. The muttering of the sea increased, but he could not see it.

He imagined that water was filling the universe, blotting out the earth, inundating the air, blanketing the sky, spreading, flowing, liquid death.

Nels bent low, and kept his eye on the compass needle. The needle and the tiller in his hand were his anchors to life and reality. His soul grew out of the tiller, and flickered with the compass needle.

The fog had the consistency of beaten egg white. It tasted like the white scum on breakers. It was the poisonous breath of the ocean. His sense of time was so confused by the eclipse of sea and sky that for a moment he thought it was that other time, that episode of his childhood that had given him his fear of the sea. But, "No," he said aloud, shaking himself out of the nightmare, "no, I am grown; I am a man." But it was the same fog, and he could not resist the impression that he was still six years old, wandering lost on the beach at Bergen.

He did not want to think of it, but each second of that terrible morning was superimposed on the instant of the present. It was as if time had been folded over on itself.

He was six years old, playing at the water's edge, building mud castles for the waves to destroy. The fog had come down suddenly, wiping out land and sea. For hours he had wandered, and the sea played a diabolical game with him. Try as he would to get away from it, it would weave around in that cottony fog and intercept him. Wherever the little boy went, he would stumble into salt water. Then he would turn and flee terrified into the fog. But soon the familiar chilling water would catch him by the ankles. Waves started to chase him. One would come rushing out of the fog, knock him down, try to pull him in. He stepped from beach into water, and when he tried to step back, the beach was not there. All this time he could see nothing but white mist; he could hear nothing but the distant cries of other lost ones.

When the fog lifted, little Nels had been found lying in the sand, his knees drawn up, his face in his hands. The playful waves came up at intervals and rocked his trembling child's body.

A strange thought suggested itself to Nels now: what if all his life had been illusion; what if he had never escaped from the sea? Perhaps it had permitted him to dream, and now, at last, was closing in and taking—

What was that? The compass—off. South. "Thank God for the compass. I will only think of the compass. Bring it back west. Two hundred fifty-five degrees west. That little line. Two hundred fifty-five. Fight! Don't think. Pull the tiller. Watch the compass. Two hundred fifty-five. . . .

"I won't give in," he moaned.

Wet splashes on his face. He thought he was crying. No. It was raining. And the wind was rising.

"Fight, you devil, you wet hound, you pouring monster. Cover me, drown me. I'll fight."

Nels growled and bared his teeth like a beast.

"Storm," he cried hoarsely, "go ahead, storm! I'll strangle your damn' storm. . . . Watch the compass! Two hundred forty-five. No, fifty-five. . . . Damn it, you're choking me. Take your wet hands off my throat—" There was a sharp crack. The boat leaped as if it had been struck. Nels fell forward.

ROLF! Get up!" Marya shook him. "Something has happened." They came out into the drizzle. The wind whipped them with rain. The boat was rocking helplessly. Nels lay on his face.

Marya ran to Nels; Rolf ran to the tiller.

"He's hurt," she said.

"It's broken," he replied.

When investigated, however, neither injury was serious. Nels had merely fainted.

"Knocked down and stunned," Rolf said tolerantly. "We must have hit a mine or something. Lucky we're not floating around the sky in little bits. The rudder-post is out of the socket, but I don't think it's bent. At least, it's hard to see in this water." He did not even think the fog worthy of comment.

"Can you fix it?" asked Marya.

"Can you revive him?" he asked in turn.

"He is coming to. I will get the brandy out of the chest."

"That wonderful chest," Rolf said. He was examining the steering-gear with a thoughtful but perfectly composed air.

"I will have to go down," he announced calmly.

"Down?" said Marya, returning with the brandy.

"The rudder is knocked loose. I will have to put it back. That's all."

"Wet hands," Nels mumbled.

"What happened, Nels—what did we hit?" Marya asked. She pillowed his head on her breast.

"I'm all right," Nels replied. In a few minutes he was able to stand up.

Rolf tied a rope to the mast, and fastened the other end to his belt. "Help me down." They let him into the water.

The icy shock took his breath and vision away for an instant. He remembered the night of Sigurd's death. His heart pounded.

He worked his way to the rudder. He could not get leverage at the surface of the water. Taking three successive breaths, he forced himself under and gripped the keel with his feet. He hurried. There were sharks, he recalled.

Rolf yanked and tugged and strained. He came to the surface, gasping.

On the third trial, the rudder went back into place.

"Up!" he cried, and his face was blue.

They pulled. But the boy hung limply.

"Rolf! Climb up!" his sister said urgently. Rolf moved his lips and his fingers tightened, but he could not rise.

With a splash Nels went into the ocean. He put his feet against the side of the boat and pushed up under Rolf's armpits. Marya leaned over the gunwale and hauled. They pulled and pushed the boy into the boat.

Nels climbed the rope with unexpected ease.

Rolf shivered. Marya thrust the brandy-bottle into his hands. He took two burning gulps.

"It's done. Fixed." Rolf sat down on the deck floor.

"Good," Nels said. "Now,"—and his voice rang commandingly,—"take him back to bed, Marya. I will stick it out till morning."

"No. My watch," Rolf protested. But lack of sleep, and the after-effects of wrestling in the chilly water were too much for him, and he fell into a doze.

"Take him, Marya!" said Nels. She looked up timidly. There standing at the helm was the captain of the ship. Marya obeyed. . . .

That was a night of terror for Nels. But he knew he was winning. The solid wood of the tiller, the warm flash of a match, the compass needle—these were his allies.

Toward morning Marya stole out quietly, and sat by her husband, silently. After a time he took her hand.

ON Thursday, a day and a half later, a British bomber flew over them. Nels ordered Rolf to enter this occurrence in the log. Nels had decided that his ship had to have a well-kept log.

Nels' beard came out black. Marya thought this far stronger and fiercer than a vermilion patch. When they reached Scotland, she would get him a pipe.

"What a deep voice Nels has!" Rolf mocked.

"You can hear it through any sea," Marya replied seriously.

The weather was rainy. Nels asked whether they had brought anything to protect the helmsman—in this digni-

fied manner, he referred to himself. Nels permitted Rolf to steer only for short intervals in calm weather.

"There is an old oilskin in the bottom of the chest," Marya said.

"I'll get it," Rolf offered.

"Do you think we are near land?" Marya asked her husband.

"Perhaps. I will take you to Iceland if need be." He laughed joyously. "After all, it is just so much more water."

"Nels!"

"My wife," he said tenderly—without, however, releasing the tiller. The first duty of a sailor is to his ship.

"What is keeping Rolf?" Marya said. She looked into the cabin. Rolf stood lost in thought. In his hands was the raincoat.

It was wrapped protectively around a blue sweater—Rolf's sweater, knitted for him by his mother. It was the last thing he had seen in her ever-busy hands.

"Then she knew," he said softly, sensing the presence of his sister.

Marya put her arm around his shoulder. "Put it on, Rolf."

Rolf slipped it over his head. "Good-by, Mother," he whispered into the wool as it brushed by his lips.

"Rolf! Marya!" Nels shouted. "I see land!"

"Coming!" Rolf called. Marya picked up Eric the Red, and gripped his wooden head tightly.

"The clouds cleared on the west!" Nels cried exultantly.

"The Faroes!" exclaimed Rolf. A great headland was rising out of the sea.

"Scotland!" And the captain, forgetting his dignity, embraced his wife.

Marya let the wooden image of Eric the Red slip into the water.

"Back to the sea, Viking!"

IT was Thursday. . . . Land and sea patrols had been doubled. They were searching the shoreline inch by inch. Kristaver understood; they knew by his silence that he was trapped. They would not relax the search till they caught him.

Hjalmar must be dead, he decided. He had not told, and if he had not told by now, he must be dead.

The food supply was low, and his tobacco was running out. Kristaver also suffered acutely from lack of fresh water.

"I will not starve like a three-legged tiger!"

He climbed the hill for the last time. He could see motorcyclists guarding the road. He could not escape that way.

He broke his way through the brush that lined the shore of the fjord. He could advance for some distance, but finally and inexorably the road came down to the shore and closed the ring about him. There was no escape that way.

He studied the fjord. Half a dozen torpedo boats kept a continual watch. No escape that way.

Kristaver returned to his boat. He thought for a long time. His pipe went out.

Finally he stood up. Putting his hand on the trunk of the big fir, he swept the hill, the sky, and the fjord with a piercing glance.

He climbed into the launch and started the motor. For a moment he paused, admiring the beauty and marvelous workmanship of the swift boat, and the tiny truck that it carried.

A thought struck him.

He got out and wrote in the sand:

"The last yard of Norway to be conquered."

Kristaver drove the gray boat into the fjord at top speed. . . .

Back to the sea, Viking!

NEXT MONTH: A complete novel by Frederick Bechdolt.

Readers' Forum*

(Continued from page 1)

GENUINELY AMERICAN

There is something genuinely American in that August BLUE BOOK I have just finished. An intended ten minutes of recreational reading just naturally turned into a full evening of enjoyment and inspiration.

Stories as the production-line thriller "When Rivets Explode," by the almost legendary Tracy Richardson, the episode of the Hindu ace releasing the spirit of a sleeping China, the sheer dogged determination of "Hell in High Air," the unflinching devotion to duty even in those who have seeming greater weaknesses in "The Bosun's Ladder," simply warm you up inside with renewed confidence in the meaning of real courage—courage that is ready to dare and that is, at the same time, tempered with understanding of what it takes to do the job.

And for variety, the historical echoes of Vikings and Conquistadores, as well as the story of patriotism, adventure, and dramatic surprises of "Madagascar Hazard" and the other good yarns in this issue, all go together to make the qualities in the genuine American spirit. . . . What more could one want in one issue!

R. O. Jonas,
Austin, Texas.

AND WOMEN

You men—yes, you too, Mr. Editor—are forever trying to fit women into nice little mental pigeonholes, you have all padded and prepared for us. For instance, that proud motto of yours "Stories of Adventure for Men, by Men"! Yes, I know we women are supposed to be able to satisfy any faint stirrings of mental appetite with the soporific slush dished out by the myriad "Love" and "Confession" magazines. Well, let me tell you, I'd not swap one good, meaty BLUE BOOK for every word of sickly drivel they've ever printed. You'd be pleasantly surprised too, if you knew how many women friends agree with me.

When my husband brings in a new BLUE BOOK he hangs on to it like grim death, for he knows if he puts it down a minute, I'll have it, and there will be something I just have to read before giving it back.

Yours for more "Stories of Adventure for red-blooded men and women."

Mrs. S. G. Yarnell,
Fort Worth, Texas.

*The Editors of BLUE BOOK are glad to receive letters of constructive criticism and suggestion; for the ones we publish each month we will pay the writers ten dollars each.

Letters should not be longer than two hundred words, no letters can be returned, and all will become property of McCall Corporation. They should be addressed: Editor of Letters, Blue Book Magazine, 230 Park Ave., New York.

NEXT MONTH

Devastator Men

A stirring novel of adventure aboard an American aircraft carrier in the North Atlantic.

by ARCH WHITEHOUSE

A BLUE battle-light gleamed over the bulkhead, brushing a leaden tone over everything metal in the compartment. Outside, the hiss of a racing prow slicing the waves maintained a sizzling taunt of derision. The prow of the aircraft carrier was rising and falling like a massive wedge that would slip beneath the horizon line and lift the canopy of heaven by brute force.

Three or four figures sat on the edge of a heavy maintenance table and watched with professional interest the dexterous movements of the man who sat before them. The figure of interest sat behind a metal tripod and fingered the important parts of a beautiful piece of oil-shiny mechanism. He was blindfolded so that the hollows of his temples formed small pockets inside the bindings of the handkerchief. His broad forehead was only slightly marked by the tracery of concentration.

"To strip back plate," the blindfolded figure was saying, as if by rote, "remove latch pin, cotter pin and back plate latch pin. . . . The back plate latch spring plunger. Unscrew adjusting screws and remove buffer discs, friction pieces and plunger."

While he spoke, his fingers carried out the movements dexterously. He spoke quietly, selecting his words carefully, and placed the stripped parts of the Browning gun on a small table on either side. A Marine captain watched, consulted his wrist-watch at intervals and raised his eyebrows to signify his incredulity.

"At ease, gentlemen. Carry on!" a voice said. It was unquestionably the voice of authority, but to Eddie Prebley it carried a deeper impression. It rang a gong in Eddie Prebley's chest and made him rise to his feet, straddling the long leg of the gun-tripod.

"Carry on!" the voice ordered again, and the maintenance table grumbled as the rest planted their haunches on its splintered edge.

Eddie Prebley sat down again and continued: "Remove ejector pin with the point of a drift," he went on making certain that the ejector spring did not fly out while the ejector pin was being removed.

Captain Edward Ranford, Skipper of the U.S.S. *Bennington*, stood practically at attention as he watched and listened. Eddie Prebley could almost feel the intense study of the unseen man's eyes on the backs of his hands as he dismantled the extractor.

There had been no formal presentation of the ship's company on the quarter-deck, and Prebley had not as yet officially met his commander. This was like a checkout flight at Pensacola when you wondered whether you'd made it or not. This was worse in fact, sitting here going through a blindfold routine of stripping a gun.

"Okay, Prebley," the Marine captain said suddenly. "You're well under time. Good effort. Take over, DuLaigne!"

Prebley stood up and thumbed the handkerchief from his eyes and handed it to a C.P.O. aviation pilot.

"Baby, you sure gave the Big Guy a show," Tod Moresby whispered over Prebley's shoulder. "You had him goggle-eyed."

Prebley did not answer or turn around. He was transfixed by the eyes of the man who held command. Outside, the bull horn was bellowing an order from the battlements of the carrier's island and a squadron of aircraft answered the summons by spluttering their motors. A boatswain's pipe screeched tunelessly over the loud-speaker system, and another group of the flying personnel was ordered to be ready for a later patrol.

Through all this, the two men stared at one another. Captain Ranford no longer showed interest in the stripping proceedings. He was too taken up by the features of the man who had just removed his blindfold.

Finally he muttered something to his Executive Officer and turned to leave. Prebley was still unable to take his eyes off the man, and hardly offered an acknowledgment when the Skipper's Executive turned back to say: "The Captain wishes to see you in his quarters in half an hour."

"Yes sir," he answered finally as the Exec. was heading through the bulkhead. (Arch Whitehouse carries on from there.)

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